SERMONS

ON

SOCIAL LIFE.

BY WILLIAM WOOD.

ordina in guisa
Gli humani eventi il ciel, che tutti a tutti
Siam necessari.

METASTASIO.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, No. 72,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD.
MDCCLXXV.

BRITISH MUSEUM

To the Reverend THOMAS JERVIS

These sermons are inscribed,

As a sincere, tho' inadequate expression

Of the author's affectionate esteem

For the friend of his youth,

And companion of his early studies.

Leeds, JULY XX, mdcclxxv

PREFACE.

THE *motives of publication are the common topic of a preface; and it may be thought that ſome excuſe is neceſſary, for adding to the number of the ſermons which are already in the hands of the public. For this reaſon, pecuniary emolument cannot be ſuppoſed to be a principal object. Nor, perhaps, is the love of fame more likely to be gratified. Where either of theſe are expected, novelty muſt be ſtudied, or the public appetite will not be excited. But who will ever dream of meeting with any thing new under the hackneyed title of* SERMONS? *Nor can the importunity of friends, in the preſent caſe, be pleaded. The following ſermons were compoſed ſolely for the pulpit; and they would, probably, never have been*

tranſcribed for the preſs, if it had not been deſireable to find amuſement for ſome ſolitary hours, which could not ſo well be devoted to the labour of invention.

Happy the man, who can amuſe himſelf, without ſtepping beyond the line of his profeſſion! Still happier, if he can render his amuſements conducive to the welfare of mankind! The author does not heſitate to aſſert, that the ſubject of theſe diſcourſes is important. Of their execution he is not a little diffident. He is much too young to affect an indifference to the public favour. Next to the eſteem of the particular ſociety with which he is moſt happily connected, the approbation of his countrymen would give him the higheſt ſatisfaction. But if his well meant attempts ſhould be found unequal to his

wiſhes, he will readily ſubmit to the deciſion of ſuperior judgment; and will conſole himſelf with the reflection, that his works may not be totally uſeleſs, when they ſilently ſteal

——in vicum vendentem thus & odores.

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.
On general Benevolence.
HEB. x. 24.
And let us consider one another to provoke unto love. Page 1.

SERMON II.
On mutual Edification.
HEB. x. 24.
And let us consider one another to provoke unto good works. P. 15.

SERMON III.
On universal Sympathy.
1 PET. iii. 8.
Having compassion one of another. P. 35.

SERMON IV.
On Compassion.
1 PET. iii. 8.
Be pitiful. P. 55.

SERMON V.
On Courtesy.
1 PET. iii. 8.
Be courteous. P. 73.

CONTENTS.

SERMON VI.

On ſympathetic Joy.

ROM. xii. 15.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice. P. 93.

SERMON VII.

On religious Converſation.

MALACHI iii. 16.

Then they that feared the Lord ſpake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. P. 113.

SERMON VIII.

On Truth.

MATT. xiv. 9.

And the king was ſorry; nevertheleſs for his oath's ſake, he commanded it to be given her. P. 133.

SERMON IX.

Againſt the Fear of Man.

PROV. xxix. 25.

The Fear of Man bringeth a Snare. P. 157.

CONTENTS.

SERMON X.

Againſt the Exceſs of good Nature.

MATT. xiv. 9.

And the king was ſorry; nevertheleſs, for the ſake of them which ſat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. P. 179.

SERMON XI.

On the dangerous Influence of little Faults.

1 THESS. v. 22.

Abſtain from all Appearance of Evil. P. 199.

SERMON XII.

Againſt certain Faults which, on account of of their ſuppoſed minuteneſs are generally overlooked.

1 THESS. v. 22.

Abſtain from all Appearance of Evil. P. 217.

ERRATA.

Page	Line	for	read
9	17	*precious*	*previous*
28	24	*theſe*	*there*
69	22	*goods*	*good*
149	15	*hart*	*hurt*
197	9	*ſacrified*	*ſacrificed*

SERMON I.

ON

GENERAL BENEVOLENCE.

SERMON I.

ON

GENERAL BENEVOLENCE.

SERMON I.

On General Benevolence.

HEB. x. 24.

And let us conſider one another to provoke unto love.

THE ſocial appetite, my brethren, was given us to anſwer many important purpoſes. It was intended to enlarge the ſphere of our action; to render us mutually ſubſervient to each other's welfare; and, thereby, to encreaſe the degree of our *private* happineſs. Unconnected with his brethren, man is the moſt helpleſs of animals; timid, irreſolute, and void of ſagacity; unable to cope with the various enemies which ſurround him; and leſs provided with the means of defence than any other living creature. There is, therefore, no race of beings on the face of the earth, to whom ſociety is ſo deſireable, and mutual relief ſo neceſſary. Many of the tribes of inferior animals aſſociate together, by an inſtinctive principle, which leads them to take pleaſure in each

other's company. But there are ſcarcely any, who cannot ſubſiſt with tolerable comfort, in ſolitude. The bounteous earth affords them the proviſion which is adapted to their nature. They can rove abroad, and ſatisfy their wants, without the aid of their brethren. Their natural, heaven-implanted ſkill directs them to their proper food; points out to them the means of defence, with which they are furniſhed; or impels them to ſeek for their ſafety by flight. The wiſdom of every individual comprehends the wiſdom of the whole ſpecies; the deliberation of numbers cannot contribute to their improvement; the experience of a long ſeries of generations hath not made any addition to their knowledge.

The human race are, in all theſe reſpects, the direct reverſe of their fellow inhabitants of the earth. They are not only furniſhed with faculties, which render a ſocial intercourſe peculiarly delightful; but are placed in a ſituation, which makes ſuch an intercourſe abſolutely neceſſary for their welfare. The joint labour of many muſt be em-

ployed, before the earth will produce the ſupplies of their wants in a proper perfection; the early knowledge of the individual is ſcanty and inſufficient; their ſeparate ſtrength, when they are arrived at full maturity, is comparatively trifling; and it is only by their united efforts, that they can make full proviſion for their happineſs.

What then, my brethren, can be a more pertinent addreſs, to creatures thus formed, and thus ſituated, than that of the apoſtle in the text? *Let us conſider one another.* We are ſurrounded by innumerable beings, who have the ſame ſhape, the ſame powers, and the ſame deſires, with ourſelves. There is not one of them, who is not, or who may not, in ſome manner and degree, be ſubſervient to our welfare. Whatever may be their ſituation in life, however they may differ from us in a thouſand external circumſtances, yet ſtill they have a capacity of uſefulneſs; and, if we take an accurate and extenſive ſurvey of human life, we ſhall find, that we are actually deriving ſome ad-

vantages from the exertions of their heads, or the labour of their hands.

And is it poſſible for us to live without recollecting theſe benefits? Can we be placed in the midſt of beings, with whom we are ſo intimately connected, and to whom we are ſo much obliged, and yet confine our attention to ourſelves, or act as if we were entirely independent and ſelf-ſufficient? Do not our ſituation in the world, our preſent feelings, and our paſt experience all lead us *to conſider one another?* And is not this ſocial conſideration a powerful provocative to univerſal and efficacious benevolence?

The general duty, then, is ſufficiently plain and evident. When ſo much of our happineſs depends on the advantages, which we derive from ſociety, the individuals of which ſociety is compoſed, are all entitled to our regard and good will. It is not only the perſon who is related to us by conſanguinity or affinity—it is not only the friend who is connected with us by an intimate intercourſe—every one who is, in any re-

ſpect, within the ſphere of our influence, hath a right to the benevolent conſideration, which is enjoined in the text.

But the manner in which this general benevolence ſhould be exerted, and the effect, which it ought to produce on the conduct, are the points, which are moſt worthy of our attention. For with reſpect to theſe, we are too apt to deceive ourſelves. But if we pay a proper regard to the advice of the apoſtle, we ſhall eaſily form an accurate judgment on this ſubject. A juſt conſideration of our mutual circumſtances, and an impartial compariſon of ourſelves with others, will lead us to entertain favourable ſentiments of our brethren, and will *provoke us to* the exerciſe of *love*.

If we examine the conduct of our fellow creatures, we ſhall, indeed, be under the painful neceſſity of diſapproving many of their actions. And wherever the feeling of diſapprobation takes place, our eſteem and affection will, of neceſſity, in ſome meaſure,

be diminiſhed. But it is incumbent upon us to take away ſomewhat of the force of this diſagreeable feeling, by reflecting on the more amiable parts of a character. There are few men whoſe general behaviour is not capable of being exhibited in two very different lights. A candid obſerver will make every poſſible allowance for errors, and dwell with peculiar pleaſure, on every diſpoſition and action, which is virtuous and laudable: while the eye of malignity will purſue a contrary method, and, by magnifying faults and diminiſhing excellencies, will form a judgment that is altogether unfavourable. It is well known to painters that every human countenance is ſuſceptible of a likeneſs, that is more beautiful, or more deformed than the truth, according to the pleaſure of the artiſt. The general outlines may continue nearly the ſame, and yet the effect that is produced be entirely different. A ſkilful ſoftening of the diſproportionate features, and a fuller diſplay of thoſe, that will ſtand the teſt of a critical examination, cannot fail of exhibiting a flattering appearance. When, on the contrary, a little heighten-

ing of the irregular parts, and a ſmall diſtortion of thoſe that are in reality beautiful, will produce either an hideous or ridiculous portrait. The caſe is exactly the ſame with reſpect to the deſcription of the mind. The hand of charity will draw a pleaſing repreſentation of a character, which, under the pencil of ill nature, will be highly irregular and diſagreeable. And judge, my brethren, which is the moſt generous and honourable employment; a laboured diſplay of blemiſhes and deformities; or an elegant delineation of graces and beauties. Hogarth and Guido both improved their reſpective talents to an uncommon degree of excellence; but who would be Hogarth rather than Guido? And can it be neceſſary to aſk, which is moſt agreeable to the advice of the apoſtle; a ſtudied enquiry into the errors of our neighbour's conduct; or a candid ſurvey of his laudable qualities? If we *conſider each other* with an uncharitable eye, how can we form thoſe affectionate ideas of our fellow creatures, which are ſo favourable to the well being of ſociety?

We have indeed every poſſible inducement to *conſider one another to provoke unto love*. For a candid, and, upon the whole, an amiable opinion of mankind is abſolutely neceſſary, if we wiſh to obtain thoſe advantages from them, which our ſocial powers were intended to produce. To be in good humour with the world—to dwell chiefly on the excellencies of our friends and neighbours—to loſe, as much as poſſible, the remembrance of their imperfections, is ſo pleaſing in itſelf and ſo conducive to our improvement in general benevolence, that we muſt be inattentive to *our own intereſt*, if we do not endeavour to conſider *others* in this favourable light. Dark and gloomy, unſocial and moroſe is the mind, in which ſuſpicion and uncharitableneſs are predominant. Unhappily indeed muſt that mental eye be formed, by which vices are magnified, and virtues are diminiſhed. Let *me* always examine the conduct of my fellow creatures with a heart favourably diſpoſed for the exerciſe of affection; let me think well of mankind as a ſpecies, notwithſtanding the errors with which the character of

every individual may be ſhaded; and let me rather be ſome times deceived by unſuſpecting confidence, than have the pureſt ſources of my happineſs diſturbed by a mixture of diſtruſt. For of what advantage will be all my ſocial affections, if I entertain continual apprehenſions of the men with whom I am connected? Far better were it to be for ever unacquainted with mankind, than to conſider them in a light, which will provoke unto ſuſpicion and hatred.

It is, therefore, the duty of every ſocial being to conſider his fellow creatures with benevolence and affection. But this is not the full extent of the apoſtolical precept. It was neceſſary, however, to lay down theſe precious principles, not only on account of their own importance, but becauſe the duty, which we are now to enforce, would otherwiſe have been deſtitute of a proper foundation. Unleſs we *ourſelves* feel the influence of the benevolent affections, we ſhall have neither inclination nor authority to recommend them to *others*. And it is only the habitual exerciſe of this friendly employ-

ment, which can form the completive excellence of our ſocial characters. It is not ſufficient for us to foſter the principles of univerſal charity in our own boſoms; we muſt ſtimulate our friends and companions to the ſame laudable exertion of their benign diſpoſitions, and labour to produce in them a general eſteem of their fellow creatures. This ought to be one of the grand ends of our intercourſe with mankind; it is an object of which we ſhould never loſe ſight; and for the obtaining of which we ſhould omit no generous endeavour.

The means, which are neceſſary to promote this deſireable end, are eaſily diſcovered. If we act directly contrary to the uſage of many of our moſt eloquent declaimers on the conduct and character of their neighbours, we ſhall not deviate far from the right path. If we conſider one another in the manner which hath already been recommended, and cultivate the general benevolence which hath been enforced, we ſhall chooſe to expatiate, in the hour of unreſtrained converſation, on the excellencies

and virtues of our brethren; and ſhall ſelect ſuch anecdotes, as have a tendency to make our acquaintance in good humour with each other, and with mankind in general. For it is only the brighter part of a character, which, as converſation is generally conducted, is the proper topic of diſcourſe. An enumeration of faults and vices might, indeed, be uſeful, if it were reſtrained by the ſtricteſt candor, and were intended only as a ſalutary caution againſt ſimilar irregularities. But as this is ſeldom the caſe, and as there is great danger of undue cenſoriouſneſs and malevolence, it is better to give up the advantages, which might poſſibly ariſe, than hazard the conſequences, which are moſt likely to enſue. The true friend of ſociety, therefore, will avoid every particular, which is likely to relax the vigour of the benevolent affections; his praiſes will not be diminiſhed by inuendoes; nor ſucceeded by a qualifying *But*, which entirely takes away the effect of every thing that hath been mentioned before. Where he can honeſtly commend, he will do it with openneſs and fervor; and where he is oblig-

ed to diſapprove, he will draw the charitable veil of compaſſion, and attempt to conceal the unpleaſing circumſtance. For with what view can he introduce a ſubject, the relation of which is painful to himſelf, and cannot poſſibly be conducive to the advantage of his aſſociates? How is it poſſible to retain our affection for the perſons, whoſe faults we are continually diſplaying, and whoſe conduct we habitually repreſent in an unfavourable light? And how can we *provoke unto love* by a ſtudied detail of actions, which are the natural objects of diſapprobation and diſlike? Whence, then, ariſes the ill-natured pleaſure, which is too often indulged in pointing out the little faults and venial foibles of otherwiſe reſpectable characters? Is it eaſy to reconcile it with that general benevolence, which ought to be the diſtinguiſhing temper of brethren? Can it, in any reſpect, be thought conſiſtent with our avowed principles, as chriſtians? Or can it be at all defended on the principles of wiſdom and ſound policy? It is natural for us to wiſh, that our intimate companions may be animated by all the benevo-

lent affections, and be diſpoſed to the practice of all the ſocial virtues. We feel that theſe qualifications are eſſential to a valuable friend. We ſhould ſoon chooſe other aſſociates, were we to find that thoſe, whom we have already acquired, are remarkably deficient in theſe valuable particulars. Is it not the part of prudence, then, to do all in our power to preſerve the neceſſary accompliſhments, which our friends at preſent poſſeſs? But is the rancorous tale of malice, the oblique ſtroke of defamation, or even the lively ſally of ridicule, likely to contribute to this deſireable end? Believe me, my brethren, we ſhall not provoke our acquaintance to the love either of ourſelves or others, by ſo illiberal a diſpoſition. We muſt *conſider one another* in a very different manner, or we ſhall directly contradict the precept of the apoſtle.

Let us, then, be careful to render our ſocial intercourſe productive of the end, for which it was deſigned. In all our judgments, let candor and benevolence have a

diſtinguiſhed place; let us *ſeek the things, which make for peace*; let us cover our neighbours faults with a friendly charity; and do that juſtice to their laudable qualities, which will induce us to eſteem and love them.

SERMON II.

ON

MUTUAL EDIFICATION.

SERMON II.

On Mutual Edification.

HEB. x. 24.

And let us conſider one another to provoke unto good works.

NOTHING can be more evident, my brethren, than that the human race were deſigned for the exerciſe of reciprocal affection. Their inſtinctive ſocial propenſities, their ſingular weakneſs in a ſtate of ſolitude, and the mighty advantages, which they derive from mutual aſſiſtance, all clearly indicate, that it is incumbent upon them *to conſider one another*. As every one is, in ſome reſpect and degree, dependent upon many of his fellow creatures, the intereſt of the community cannot be different from the private intereſt of *all* the individuals of which it is compoſed; and the intereſt of any *ſingle* individual, when rightly underſtood, cannot be inconſiſtent with the real intereſt of the *whole body*, or any of its *parts*.

But, unhappily, there have many cauſes ariſen from the gradual progreſs of ſociety, which have prevented the univerſal prevalence of this ſalutary and equitable judgment. The introduction of private property hath neceſſarily occaſioned the introduction of ſeparate intereſts, and the refinements of commerce have ſet theſe ſeparate intereſts exceedingly at variance with each other. It is eaſy for one man to increaſe his own fortune at the expence of his neighbour, and to erect the pile of his own wealth and grandeur, on the ruin of thoſe, who are leſs ſkilful or enterprizing than himſelf. To prevent the irregularities, which would be produced by the unlimited deſire of private property, civil laws have been contrived, and the bounds of juſtice aſcertained. And to reſtrain the conduct of mankind in caſes, which are not within the reach of political regulations, the moraliſt hath appealed to a higher tribunal, and the chriſtian preacher hath urged the motives and ſanctions, which are delivered in the new teſtament. By theſe means the ſtate of human ſociety is rendered tolerably peace-

able and regular; the vileſt are, in ſome meaſure, reſtrained by the terror of puniſhment, and we flatter ourſelves, that many of our hearers are influenced by more generous principles. Yet ſtill, we cannot hope entirely to counteract the exorbitant authority of the love of ſelf. We endeavour to prevent its proceeding to any atrocious degree of irregularity, and are happy, when we perſuade our fellow men to exert themſelves for the public, as well as their own private good. But, in the preſent ſituation of human affairs, the deſire of an increaſe of property muſt retain its power; intereſts, therefore, will often interfere, and the hoſtile paſſions too frequently ariſe.

There is, however, one ſpecies of property which is not ſubject to theſe inconveniences; there is one reſpect, in which we may exert ourſelves to the utmoſt, for the advancement of the intereſt of our fellow creatures, without any diminution of our own profits. It is ſuggeſted in the text. *Let us conſider one another to provoke unto good works.* The poſſeſſion of virtue has this diſtinguiſhed

advantage, that, tho' ſtrictly perſonal, it may be transferred, or rather diffuſed, without any detriment to the original proprietor. In reality, the more we contribute to the moral improvement of *others*, the more firmly do we ſecure, the more amply do we encreaſe, our *own* excellence. Here, then, the intereſts of the individual and the public exactly coincide. When you are called upon to labour for the benefit of your fellow creatures in this reſpect, you are ſolicited to pay a due regard to your own welfare, and are informed how you may promote it to the greateſt poſſible advantage.

And what, my brethren, can be a more noble exertion of our ſocial powers, than an attempt to animate our brethren to the practice of virtue? How can we conſider one another more benevolently and uſefully, than by endeavouring to *provoke unto good works*? Here the amiable diſpoſitions of our minds may have full exerciſe; here we may render ourſelves bleſſings to the public: and, at the ſame time, ſecure more effectually than by any other method, our own private happineſs.

In order to produce this important effect, and to yield a due obedience to the precept in the text, let us

I. Endeavour to provoke our aſſociates to the exerciſe of virtue by our own excellent example.

A good man, ſaid the *Stoics*, will do his duty, without paying any regard to the opinion of the world. But a good man, who acts upon *chriſtian* principles, will be careful to do ſomething more. He will make conſcience of doing his duty, with the ſtricteſt fidelity; but he will, alſo, be ſolicitous to perform it in that particular manner, which is moſt likely to *obtain* the good opinion of the world. For it is incumbent upon us to profit our fellow creatures by our example, as well as by our charitable aſſiſtance. It is not ſufficient to have merely the teſtimony of our *own* conſciences in our favour: we owe much to the ſentiments of *mankind*, and ſhall fail in our duty, if we do not endeavour to ſecure *their* approbation. This is a precept which was frequently re-

peated by Chriſt and his apoſtles. *Let your light ſo ſhine before men, as that they, ſeeing your good works, may glorify your father who is in heaven: let us follow after things, whereby one may edify another: in all things, ſhew thyſelf a pattern of good works:* and *let us conſider one another to provoke unto good works,* is the conſtant language of the ſacred writings.

There is in reality nothing more extenſively uſeful than a pattern of exalted virtue. If an improvement in moral goodneſs be the greateſt advantage, which a rational being can poſſeſs, every expedient, which is likely to benefit mankind in this important reſpect, will be joyfully embraced by the benevolent heart. And what can be more conducive to this ſalutary end, than a modeſt diſplay of its own excellencies and amiable diſpoſitions? For there is found in the human breaſt, what hath been ſtiled by a modern writer,* a ſympathetic feeling of virtue. Whenever we behold an excellent action, we not only perceive, that it is entitled to our applauſe, but are fully convinc-

* Lord Kaims. Elements of Criticiſm, ch. 2. part 1. § 4.

ed that it is alſo worthy of our imitation. We are perſuaded that we ourſelves ſhould behave in the ſame manner, if our circumſtances were exactly ſimilar; and ſhould undoubtedly follow the dictates of our hearts, if an immediate opportunity were afforded. Now a conſtant obſervation of the noble exertions of moral goodneſs will gradually form this ſympathetic feeling into a habit; the ſoul will be perpetually under the influence of a virtuous inclination, and the power of every oppoſite motive will, of courſe, be diminiſhed.

Such, my brethren, is the natural effect of a good example; if its operations were uniform, and general, we ſhould be convinced of its excellence beyond the poſſibility of a doubt; our own happy experience would bear teſtimony in its favour, and the general goodneſs of its obſervers would be a glorious proof of its value. But, in the preſent ſtate of the world, the admirable patterns, which are exhibited by the virtuous, are counteracted and deprived of much of their efficacy, by the contaminating exam-

ples of the vicious. When irreligion is unhappily more prevalent than piety—when intemperance hath more numerous and more ardent votaries than moderation—when ſelfiſhneſs is making continual inroads upon public ſpirit, it can be no wonder that vice increaſes and virtue declines. For a bad example is as fatally contagious, as a good one is nobly elevating and inſpiring. The habitual infringer of the laws of God, is not only pernicious to himſelf in a private capacity, but is likewiſe the bane of his aſſociates, and one of the moſt dreadful peſts of ſociety. The impious diſcourſe of one profane ſwearer, will gradually eradicate the reverence of the ſupreme being from the minds of all, who are accuſtomed to his company. The riotous exceſſes of one intemperate profligate, will ſeduce numbers into drunkenneſs and debauchery. The mean devices and diſhonourable advantages, which are made uſe of by one ſelfiſh ſpirit, will greedily be ſeized, as plauſible excuſes, by thoſe, who have the ſame deſires, but leſs natural effrontery. The contracted hand of one unfeeling wretch, will be un-

derſtood by others, as a ſignal to ſuppreſs the unavoidable feelings of their hearts, and to withold their tribute from the moſt beneficial charity.

And ſince evil examples are ſo numerous, and their influence ſo pernicious, what can the friends of virtue do better, than to oppoſe their own engaging conduct, to the ſeductive actions of the ſons of Belial? How can a man more effectually diſcharge the duty which he owes to ſociety, than by thus promoting its general goodneſs? We are informed, if I miſtake not, by one of the ancient Hiſtorians, that, in a deciſive battle, every individual ſoldier heroically fought, as if the victory entirely depended on his ſingle arm. Let the ſame perſuaſion animate the benevolent partizans of morality. Yes, my brethren, on *your private* virtue depends, not only *your own* happineſs, but the virtue and happineſs of many of your *cotemporaries, fellow citizens and friends.* By the exerciſe of piety, you will excite others to be pious, by a rigid attention to juſtice, you will per-

ſuade others to be juſt; by a judicious application of generoſity, you will teach others to be generous; by a grateful, but moderate enjoyment of the good things of life, you will confirm the temperate in their ſelf command, and reſtrain the indulgence of thoſe, who are too much inclined to exceſs. In all your actions, then, *conſider one another*; do not confine your regard to the effects, which they will produce on *your own* intereſt; but look abroad into the world, and examine how far they may benefit or injure the morals of the *public*. As you are formed for ſociety, and indebted to ſociety for many advantages, pay your debt to ſociety, by conferring on it the moſt important ſervice, which it can poſſibly receive from any of its members. Let your ſocial intercourſe be ſo conducted, as to prove a powerful provocative to the practice of good works.

II. If we pay a juſt regard to the precept in the text, we ſhall not only recommend virtue by our own example, but ſhall regulate our friendly converſation in ſuch a

manner, as to provoke our aſſociates unto goodneſs.

The character, conduct, and ſituation of our acquaintance always do, and, I preſume, always will, afford ſome of the principal topics of our common diſcourſe. It is very ſeldom, that only a moderately large company meet together, when they do not enter, either more or leſs, upon ſubjects of this nature. And it is too often the caſe, that ill humour, malice, and envy, vent themſelves, on theſe occaſions, with great readineſs and liberality. The pernicious influence of this habit on the ſocial prineiple hath been already deſcribed. Its fatal effects of a different kind are intimately connected with our preſent ſubject.

For you will readily allow, my brethren, that there is nothing, which hath a greater tendency to impair the vigour of our virtuous affections, than a deſpicable opinion of mankind. When we are tempted to believe, that all our fellow creatures are mean and

ſelfiſh, for inſtance, which of us is there who feels his own boſom expand with a generous benevolence? When characters of this kind are expoſed to our view, we unavoidably perceive, indeed, that they are the objects of our contempt and indignation. But contempt and indignation are not, of themſelves, ſufficient to form us to a different diſpoſition. A noble emulation muſt be excited by generoſity, before we can raiſe our minds to a proper temper. A view of the ſtriking contraſt between theſe oppoſite characters, will naturally incline us to rival the one, by diſdaining all reſemblance of the other. But if we have formed a habit of viewing mankind in a diſagreeable light—if we ſuſpect, that the greater part of our brethren are unworthy of our eſteem, *our own ſouls* will gradually aſſume *their* fancied character—we ſhall be deſtitute of ſufficient inducements to a noble courſe of conduct, and ſhall be incapable of that divine ambition which animates the wiſe and good. When was theſe ever a ſour miſanthrope, or cenſorious ſplenetic who was poſſeſſed of any illuſtrious virtue? Is it not notorious, that

men generally cenſure with the greateſt ſeveverity, thoſe very foibles or vices, which are the moſt ſtriking traits of their own characters? I have frequently heard the ſordid, penurious wretch, who would not ſcruple to hazard his reputation or his ſoul, for a deſpicable advantage, declaiming, with all the warmth of impaſſioned eloquence, againſt the covetous diſpoſition of his neighbours. This hath generally been attributed to the blindneſs of ſelf partiality; or to a fooliſh hope of being able, by this aſſumed indignation, to conceal a fault, of which the mind is inwardly conſcious. But I ſuſpect that the real cauſe lies deeper in human nature, and depends on the principle, which hath juſt been ſuggeſted. The more I conſider the matter, the more am I convinced, that the human mind, like a drop of water, naturally ſinks to the level of its neighbours. Why ſhould we act differently from others? is a principle which I have ſome times heard openly avowed, and which, I fear, is much more frequently the concealed rule of practice.

And ſince this is the natural conſtitution of the human mind, the general opinion which we form of our fellow creatures muſt, of neceſſity, be highly important. Now there is nothing that hath a greater influence on our ſentiments in this reſpect, than the manner in which we accuſtom ourſelves to ſpeak of our *acquaintance* in our common converſation. A continual attention to the unfavourable parts of their characters,—a frequent repetition of their faults—an habitual delight in the illiberal practice of detraction muſt neceſſarily leſſen our good opinion of *mankind*. And the immediate conſequence, both with reſpect to ourſelves, and thoſe who are unhappy enough to be frequently in our company, is ſufficiently evident. We ſhall gradually become—I had almoſt ſaid *like*, but I correct the expreſſion and aſſert, that we ſhall be *worſe* than thoſe whoſe conduct we cenſure. For we ſhall join an appetite for ſcandal to the vices which are the ſubject of our reprehenſion.

Here then, my brethren, is a cogent argument againſt the indulgence of a defama-

tory temper. By ſelecting the faults of others for the topics of our familiar diſcourſe, we ſhall gradually render ourſelves and our companions incapable of exalted goodneſs. Whereas, by reverſing the ſubject, we ſhall produce a different effect, and, in conformity with the apoſtolic injunction, *ſhall provoke one another unto good works.* Let the amiable qualities of our brethren, then, be the favourite themes of our ſocial converſation. And if, at any time, their failings be occaſionally introduced, let them never be mentioned the laſt in order. This hath always a ſuſpicious appearance. It looks like the effort of ill nature to throw in an alloy to virtues, whoſe real exiſtence we are obliged to acknowledge. It will, moreover, entirely deſtroy the good effects, which would otherwiſe have been produced by the diſplay of excellence. The tranſition from virtue to vice is retrogade and diſpleaſing; it damps the ardour of the ſoul, and ſuppreſſes the emulation which was beginning to animate the heart. Whenever, therefore, a fault is mentioned, it ſhould be always immediately ſucceeded by a particular enumeration of the

virtues, which inconteſtibly belong to the ſame character. In this caſe, the unfavourable circumſtance ſeems to be ſuggeſted incidentally and without deſign; the mind appears inſtantly to recollect itſelf, and to paſs with rapidity to more agreeable ſubjects; the company are diverted from any mortifying conceptions of human nature, and are led to conſider the imperfections of their neighbours as accidental errors; the ſympathetic feeling of virtue is only ſlightly impaired, and ſoon recovers its vigour.

In theſe reſpects then, my brethren, let us *conſider one another to provoke unto good works*. How can we better manifeſt a generous benevolence, than by thus inſpiring our aſſociates with a virtuous emulation? And how can we more effectually ſucceed in this glorious enterprize, than by placing before them our own excellent example, and by frequently directing their attention to the amiable qualities of their fellow men? If there be any delight in contributing to the happineſs of our brethren, it *muſt* be produced in an eminent degree, by this pleaſing

employment. If it be true, that he who *turneth a ſinner from the error of his ways, ſaveth a ſoul alive*, how great will be our reward, if we habitually contribute to the moral improvement of our aſſociates, and ſtimulate them to the practice of univerſal virtue!

SERMON III.

ON

UNIVERSAL SYMPATHY.

SERMON III.

On Universal Sympathy.

1 Pet. iii. 8.

Having compassion one of another.

OR, as the original word should rather be rendered, *being disposed to sympathize with one another:* for the sense which is affixed to it, in our english version, is not sufficiently extensive, and makes a tautology in the context. Whereas, on the contrary, there is a beautiful progression in the precepts, which the apostle here delivers for the direction of social life. He begins with the general principle of benevolence; *be ye all of one mind*: he then lays down a rule for the easy exercise of this benevolent disposition; *being disposed to sympathize with one another:* he adds a motive for its cultivation; *love as brethren:* and concludes with specifying some of the more refined charities in which it should terminate; *be pitiful, be courteous.*

We are, at preſent, to conſider the rule which the apoſtle lays down for the eaſy exerciſe of this benevolent diſpoſition. Be ready to ſympathize with one another; transfer the feelings of your fellow creatures to your own breaſts; ſuppoſe yourſelves placed in *their* circumſtances; and conſider how *you* would be affected in the ſame ſituation.

A habit of this kind, my brethren, is the grand moving ſpring of ſocial virtue; all that remains will naturally follow, almoſt of its own accord. For if we take a view of the many irregularities, which diſgrace our conduct in public and domeſtic life, we ſhall be convinced, that they are frequently occaſioned by the want of this ſympathizing principle. Mankind are too apt to meaſure themſelves, and their fellow creatures, by a different ſtandard; to fix their whole attention on their own opinions and feelings, and to pay little regard to the opinions and feelings, which are produced by the peculiar circumſtances of their neighbours and friends. If they were all alike under the influence of this ſelfiſh diſpoſition, it is eaſy to perceive,

that univerſal diſcord and confuſion muſt be the conſequence. The ſeparate intereſt of every individual would in his own eſtimation, be encreaſed beyond meaſure, and all the ſocial virtues would ſhrink into nothing before it.

It is, therefore, of the utmoſt conſequence to the moral excellence and happineſs of life, that we pay ſtrict attention to the apoſtolic injunction on this ſubject. It is neceſſary for us, my brethren, to feel *with*, as well as *for*, our fellow creatures. We cannot diſcharge our duty to mankind, unleſs we diveſt ourſelves of every unreaſonable attachment to our own intereſt; and conſider, that our neighbours have exactly the ſame paſſions and affections as ourſelves.

On this principle alone, depends the grand rule of juſtice and integrity; *do unto others, as you would have others do unto you.* And the reaſonableneſs of this golden rule is ſo evident on the ſlighteſt conſideration, that it is not capable of being rendered more

plain and forcible. We inſtantly feel its propriety, and are obliged to acknowledge, that its authority is univerſal and perpetual. A deviation from it, in any of the greater actions of human life, is ſufficient of itſelf, to ſtamp a ſtrong impreſſion of vice on the character, and to cover it with indelible diſgrace. As far as the life or property of his neighbour is concerned, there is not a good man in the world, who does not habituate himſelf to this ſympathizing diſpoſition. In the mutual tranſactions of commerce, the great line of equity is ſufficiently diſtinct. It is the boundary between an honeſt man and a knave. To paſs over it, is to ſet the dictates of conſcience at defiance, and deliberately to infringe the ſacred rights of mankind.

But it is not the deſign of the preſent diſcourſe, my brethren, to enlarge on this capital part of morality. Here, I flatter myſelf, you need no aſſiſtance. Every eye can ſee the ſun: no one can avoid beholding the grand light of the world. I cannot ſuppoſe without painfully wounding my heart,

that any, whom I eſteem my friends, whom I delight to conſider as my chriſtian brethren, will ever, in any minute inſtance, violate the eſſential principles of juſtice. In this reſpect, I am perſuaded, you all ſympathize with one another; that is, are all under the influence of exactly the ſame ſentiments.

But there are other matters, my brethren, which, tho' not equally important, are, by no means, unworthy of your regard. The ſtars are undoubtedly much leſs glorious and uſeful than the ſun; yet an acquaintance with them is of conſiderable advantage, and is applied to important purpoſes in the buſineſs of life. It is neceſſary, however, to ſtudy them with ſome attention; as their minuteneſs, number, and apparently confuſed ſituation, prevent them from being inſtantly obſerved and diſtinguiſhed.

On this account, the miniſters of the goſpel think it their duty to inſiſt, with frequency and earneſtneſs, even on the com-

paratively inconſiderable parts of the chriſtian life. For we ſerve a maſter, who hath commanded us to be deſirous of perfection, and hath propoſed the conſummate excellencies of the divine nature as the objects of our imitation.

And there is not, perhaps, a more numerous claſs of human frailties and irregularities, than that which is occaſioned by an inattention to the full extent of the benevolent and virtuous diſpoſition which is recommended in the text. *Be ready to ſympathize with one another.* This amiable temper, were it always properly exerted, would teach us to be candid with reſpect to thoſe, who differ from us in matters of faith—it would incline us to make allowance for the errors and frailties of our brethren—and would prevent thoſe miſunderſtandings and quarrels, which are often produced by very trifling circumſtances, but are generally the ſources of great inconveniences and miſchiefs.

I. Were

I. Were we habitually to ſympathize with one another, we ſhould be diſpoſed to be candid with reſpect to thoſe, who differ from us in religious opinions.

For what are the cauſes on which our religious ſentiments depend? What are the circumſtances, which generally lead us to form the particular opinions, that conſtitute the articles of our faith? Are they not the particular views in which we happen to conſider a ſubject? And are not theſe, frequently, in a great meaſure owing to the prejudices of education, the prevailing diſpoſition of the mind, and even, ſometimes, to a peculiar train of thought, which we purſue by accident? And as theſe differ in almoſt every individual, the opinion of almoſt every individual will, in like manner, of neceſſity, be different. Hence ariſes the infinite variety of ſentiments, which is found among the inhabitants of the earth. Hence hath ariſen the vanity of all the attempts to reduce the human race to uniformity of belief. What then is to be done, my brethren? Muſt a warm regard for what we believe to

be truth, impel us to harraſs and teaze, if not perſecute and torment our brethren, on account of the opinions in which they differ from ourſelves? This would utterly deſtroy the brotherly love, which is enjoined in the context; and would render the moſt pleaſing of all the Chriſtian virtues abſolutely impracticable. We are, then, to forbear one another—to embrace what appears to ourſelves to be truth, with all meekneſs and charity—and to endeavour to produce conviction, by nothing but diſpaſſionate argument.

And we are taught, by the words of the text, an eaſy and effectual method of performing this neceſſary duty. We muſt habituate ourſelves to *ſympathize with one another*——we muſt acquire the art of transferring, for a moment, the peculiar circumſtances of *our brethren* to ourſelves——and conſider, whether they would not have produced a ſimilar effect upon *us*, if we had always been ſubject to their power.

The

The articles of my neighbour's creed are totally different from my own. Some of his opinions appear to me to be abſurd; others, to be diſhonourable to the character, and moral government of the Deity. I pity his miſtakes; but I cannot entertain either contempt or indignation. For I recollect that they were firmly rivetted in his mind, in the earlieſt part of his youth. His immature underſtanding was taught to receive them, as ſacred and uncontrovertible principles; they grew up together with him; were foſtered by the careful, tho' erring hand of education, and have at length acquired the force of a confirmed habit. There is, however, ſome hidden power of nature within him, which counteracts their influence. His actions are much better than his principles. He is eminent for the grand virtues of the chriſtian life; and tho' his character might, perhaps, be ſomewhat better, if his religious ſentiments were a little different, he is, nevertheleſs, a tender relative, a peaceable neighbour, an honeſt, induſtrious citizen, and therefore a valuable man. When I view him in this light——

when I ſympathize with him in this manner——when I, thus, put myſelf in his place——and recollect, that under the ſame circumſtances, *my* articles of belief would probably have been exactly ſimilar, every unfavourable impreſſion vaniſhes; the powerful principle of ſelf-love produces ſomething like a partiality in his favour, and notwithſtanding the difference of his ſpeculative belief, I embrace him as a friend and a brother.

This, my brethren, is one of the natural effects of the habitual exerciſe of that ſympathizing diſpoſition, which is recommended in the text. I will not detain you by diſplaying at large its excellence, when conſidered in this view. For this is of itſelf ſufficiently evident; and other conſiderations equally important demand our attention. We are to obſerve

II. That this amiable habit of univerſal ſympathy, will incline us to form a charitable judgment, concerning the general conduct of our brethren.

The nature of an action frequently depends on a little, and almoſt imperceptible circumſtance. A ſmall variation in the connections, relations, and dependencies of an agent, will produce a great change in his general duty. A courſe of conduct, which is perfectly right in one ſituation, will be imprudent, vicious, or abſolutely impracticable in another. It is neceſſary, therefore, to be well acquainted with a man's circumſtances and relations, before we can pronounce a deciſive opinion on his conduct and character. The judgment, which we form from a knowledge of the part, will often be entirely changed, by an intimate knowledge of the whole. The actions, which at firſt appeared wrong, will aſſume a different form, and extort our approbation; thoſe, which appeared doubtful, will become clear and evident; thoſe, which appeared mixed, will be found to be altogether juſt; and thoſe, which appeared imperfect in their character, will ſeem to our better informed underſtanding, as compleat as their various circumſtances would admit. We ſhall often be convinced, that we ought

not entirely to condemn, where we find it impoſſible to beſtow the full tribute of praiſe: many alleviating particulars will ariſe, in conſequence of a nearer and impartial ſurvey; and, by the proper exerciſe of the ſympathizing habit, which is the ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe, we ſhall be inclined to freely forgive, though we cannot, perhaps, wholly acquit. For when we make the caſe our own—when we enter into the feelings of the agent—conſider the ſentiments that are naturally produced by his particular ſituation—recollect the temptations to which human nature is liable—and carefully weigh the difficulty of paying the exact regard which is due to every circumſtance, we ſhall find our inclination to cenſure ſuppreſſed,—our own hearts will ſuggeſt the moſt favourable conſtruction—the veil of ſympathetic compaſſion will cover every imperfection.

But let us conſider the ſubject in a more particular light, and endeavour to bring it home to our own boſoms. There are many circumſtances in our lives, which are compleatly known to no one, but ourſelves.

Motives of prudence or delicacy forbid their publication to the world. But tho' the circumſtances themſelves muſt for ever remain a ſecret, the effects which they produce, cannot be hid from the obſervation of mankind. We naturally wiſh to obtain the approbation of all who are ſpectators of our conduct. But it is firſt neceſſary to ſecure the applauſe of our own hearts; we muſt follow the dictates of our own judgment, and purſue the courſe of conduct, which is required by all the circumſtances of our ſituation. Of theſe the world cannot judge; for, by an unavoidable neceſſity, they are concealed from its view. We are obliged, then, to act agreeably to our own knowledge, and to pay only a ſubordinate regard to the opinion of others. And in this we are undoubtedly right. The teſtimony of our own conſciences is ſuperior to every other conſideration; and we are ſurely the beſt judges of our own conduct. But yet we cannot ſet the opinion of mankind at defiance—we cannot willingly ſuſtain the load of unmerited cenſure. Do we not, then,

naturally wiſh, that our neighbours will ſuſpend their judgment; make ſome allowance for motives with which they are not acquainted; and give a little credit to the rectitude of our intentions, and our ſuperior knowledge of our own affairs? Yes, my brethren, the wiſh is natural to us all; and whenever it is not gratified by our fellow citizens, we accuſe them of injuſtice, and a want of charity. Surely then, we ought to ſympathize with one another in a feeling, which is thus univerſal; and if, in this reſpect, we do unto others, as we deſire *them* to do unto us, we ſhall always be inclined to form a favourable, or at leaſt a candid judgment, concerning the general conduct of our brethren. We are to obſerve

III. and laſtly. That the chriſtian habit, which we are now recommending, will prevent many of thoſe miſunderſtandings and quarrels, which are often produced by very trifling cauſes, but are generally the ſources of great inconveniences and miſchiefs.

The diſputes, which ſo frequently interrupt, and ſometimes intirely diſſolve the moſt agreeable friendſhips, ſcarcely ever ariſe from malignity of heart in either of the parties. The human mind is too often the ſport of capriceand ill humour. Sometimes natural, and ſometimes accidental cauſes, will produce in it a melancholy change, and render it ſtrangely at variance with itſelf. An indiſpoſition of body—an unaccountable depreſſion of the animal ſpirits—a diſappointment in ſome darling purſuit, will make it ſuſpicious of its beſt friends; cauſe it to behold every object in the moſt unfavourable light; and incline it to wreſt every action, word, and even glance of the eye from their natural meaning.

It muſt be acknowledged that theſe capricious humours are diſagreeable and hurtful; and it is incumbent upon us to avoid them as much as poſſible. But then, as we are all, more or leſs, ſubject to theſe unreaſonable fits of the ſpleen—as they frequently attack us before we are aware—as they

ſometimes are ſcarcely voluntary, and are produced by conſtitutional rather than moral cauſes, it would, ſurely, be prudent as well as friendly, to *bear one another's burdens in this reſpect*, that we may compleatly *fulfil the law of Chriſt*. A failing to which mankind are univerſally liable, muſt undoubtedly require univerſal ſympathy; and whenever it is wanting, we violate the golden rule of the goſpel, and ceaſe *to do unto others, as we wiſh that they ſhould do unto us*.

For are we not all deſirous, that our friends ſhould make ſome allowance for us, in this reſpect? Do we not call upon them for their ſympathetic compaſſion, and plead the weakneſs of human nature in our excuſe? The weakneſs of human nature, indeed, cannot be an excuſe for an *habitual* indulgence of peeviſhneſs and ill humour. But if we wiſh that this irregular propenſity ſhould be corrected and removed, it is abſolutely neceſſary for us, to bear with one another, and ſoothe, rather than aggravate, its unreaſonable emotions. For there is an obſtinacy in human nature, which is capa-

ble of being rendered the foundation of exalted virtue, as well as of aggravated vice. Its general deſcription is an impatience of direct oppoſition. The beſt method, then, of curing the petulant mood of a friend, is to ſubmit, for a time, to its power. And this we ſhall be naturally inclined to do, if we enter into the feelings of the perſon in whom it is found, and conſider, that we ourſelves, in the ſame ſituation, might poſſibly be affected in the ſame manner. And with how great advantage may we point out the inconvenience and folly of ſuch a diſpoſition, when we have yielded a little to its force, and thereby deprived it of its aſperity! Indeed, this mutual ſubmiſſion to each others failings, is not only the neceſſary conſequence of a habit of univerſal ſympathy; but is, likewiſe, the grand ſecret in the compoſition of ſocial happineſs, and is the only foundation for the perfection of benevolence.

Are you not, my brethren, pleaſingly ſurprized with the great extent, and happy influence of this ſympathetic habit? There is

not a ſituation, there is not a connection, there is ſcarcely an action of human life, in which it may not be applied with unſpeakable advantage. It is the ſupport of that reciprocal juſtice, which is the chief bond of human ſociety—it reaches to all the relations, which we bear to our fellow creatures—it teaches us to be candid with reſpect to thoſe who differ from us in religious opinions—it will incline us to form a charitable judgment concerning the general conduct of our brethren—and it will prevent thoſe miſunderſtandings and diſputes which are often produced by trifling cauſes, but are generally the ſources of great inconveniences and miſchiefs. Is not the ſubject, then, highly worthy of our attention? If we aim to obtain the completion of the chriſtian character—if we eſteem it praiſe-worthy to be eminently uſeful in the world—if the peace of our own minds be an acquiſition worth attempting—we muſt by all means habituate ourſelves to *ſympathize with one another*.

SERMON IV.

ON

COMPASSION.

SERMON IV.

On Compaſſion.

1 PET. iii. 8.

Be pitiful.

IF we examine the rules of life which were laid down by the ancient Philoſophers, we ſhall find them imperfect in many reſpects, and but ill adapted to the real ſituation and character of the human race. Some of them allowed too free an indulgence to the ſenſual appetites, and paid too little attention to the cultivation of the moral powers. Others, on the other hand, ſeemed to forget the feelings which are incident to human nature; and affected to inculcate an imaginary, elevated virtue, which is not only abſolutely impracticable in the preſent ſtate of human life, but would, alſo, be highly prejudicial to the happineſs of men, if it could be compleatly attained.

The religion of Jeſus preſerves a happy medium between theſe hurtful extremes. It pays the ſtricteſt attention to our improve-

ment in piety and virtue—it permits no exceſs in the uſe of the appetites and paſſions—it does not relax any of the obligations which ariſe from the poſſeſſion of intellectual faculties. But, tho' it commands us to deny all ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, it does not treat us as creatures who are deſtitute of animal affections. It is, on the contrary, well accommodated to our character, as beings who are compounded of body and ſpirit, reaſon and paſſion—it is mindful of our ſituation in a world of affliction and trial—and enjoins ſuch a diſpoſition and conduct, as are moſt likely to alleviate our mutual pains and diſtreſſes.

Hence the genius of the goſpel appears all amiable and engaging. It elevates by its ſublimity; but does not, in the leaſt, diſcourage by its ſeverity. It is gentle, obliging, and kind—it gives force to all the tender feelings of humanity—it is deſigned to leſſen the number and the weight of the evils of life—and commands its profeſſors to adminiſter the balm of pity to the bleeding heart. *Be ye, therefore, merciful, as your fa-*

ther alſo is merciful, is the command of Chriſt to his diſciples: *Weep with them that weep; bear ye one anothers burdens, and ſo fulfil the law of Chriſt*, is the addreſs of St. Paul to his fellow chriſtians.

When the religion of Jeſus appears in this lovely form, it cannot be neceſſary, my brethren, to offer many arguments in its favour. It ſpeaks forcibly to the ſoul, and recommends itſelf ſtrongly to our attention. Compaſſion is always an amiable and pleaſing affection of the mind; and extorts from us the tribute of approbation. We feel its utility and excellence; and are inſtinctively impelled to eſteem the perſons in whom it is found. But, tho' we cannot add force to your conviction of its value—tho' we cannot paint it in more pleaſing colours than it naturally wears, we may diſplay the extent of its influence, ſpecify a part of the great variety of actions, in which it may be exerted, and apply it to many widely different ſituations of human life.

And

And this is an office, on which it behoves the chriſtian preacher to beſtow peculiar attention. Our hearers are ſufficiently ready to acknowledge the excellence and importance of the ſeveral duties of morality. They readily join with us, when we expatiate on the general obligation of piety, juſtice, benevolence, patience, or temperance. They are fully ſatisfied with reſpect to the force of our reaſonings; and bear their united teſtimony that it is highly vicious to violate theſe ſacred principles. But they too often deſert us when we deſcend from generals to particulars; they are willing to believe, that there are many circumſtances, which preclude the obſervance of theſe duties; they fondly flatter themſelves that they manifeſt a ſufficient regard to virtue, if they profeſs a belief of its unrivalled excellence; and they are inclined to overlook the inconſiſtence between many of their actions and their general profeſſion.

On this account, it is neceſſary for us to be minute and circumſtantial in our deſcription of human duty; and with this view, I

ſhall ſolicit your attention to a particular enumeration of the caſes, in which the virtue, which is enjoined in the text, will diſplay itſelf. For I fear, my brethren, that, notwithſtanding our lively feeling of the excellence of compaſſion, there are inſtances, in which we are ready to indulge a different diſpoſition, and to treat our fellow creatures with ſome degree of cruelty. For if we do not pity them, whenever their circumſtances require it——if, in any reſpect, we blame, where we ought rather to compaſſionate——if we irritate, where we ought to condole——or exult, where we ought to lament, we are acting contrary to our duty as chriſtians——we are ſuppreſſing thoſe natural feelings, which ought to be our diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic as men. It is ſcarcely neceſſary to mention

I. That we ought to be pitiful and compaſſionate, when we behold thoſe afflictions of our fellow-creatures, which fall upon them, by the unavoidable lot of human life.

Our pity in this caſe is almoſt entirely of the inſtinctive kind. We are ſo formed by the great author of our conſtitution, that we cannot avoid ſympathizing with a ſenſible being in diſtreſs. When we are witneſſes of the cruel pangs to which the human body is liable——when we ſee youth and beauty falling victims to acute diſeaſe——when we hear the lamentations of the orphan, and behold the tears of the widow, our hearts melt——our bowels yearn——our eyes overflow——and all the features of our countenances clearly indicate the tender ſenſibility of our ſouls. When we are acquainted with the hardſhips which attend the poor, and liſten to the complaints of thoſe, that are without bread——when we are ſpectators of a ſudden tranſition from abundance to want,——and ſee honeſt induſtry, by the knavery or extravagance of others, deprived of its hardly earned pittance, we weep with the unhappy ſufferers, and bear an affectionate part in their ſorrows.

The ſympathy, which is thus produced by our fellow-creature's ſufferings, is

proper and becoming: to ſuppreſs it is no other than to fight againſt God, by counteracting the conſtitution which he hath eſtabliſhed; and the wretch, who by reiterated attempts, hath overcome this inſtinctive feeling, is arrived at the laſt ſtage of degeneracy. For there are few temptations, which have a tendency to lead us to this unnatural inſenſibility. All the genuine affections of our minds have a different direction, and immediately raiſe within us a ſympathetic pity. If we do not repel their force, they will of themſelves produce a proper effect.

It is eaſy to perceive, that an emotion which is ſo nearly mechanical, cannot poſſeſs any extraordinary degree of virtue. Where the practiſe is ſo eaſy, and the oppoſite temptation ſo weak, the exerciſe of the affection, tho' it is, undoubtedly, entitled to our approbation, will by no means extort from us any ardent expreſſions of applauſe. It is certain, then, that if our obligation to be pitiful had no greater extent, it need not have been made the ſubject of a

poſitive precept. Mankind might ſafely have been left to the natural feelings of their own hearts; and there would have been little danger of a general irregularity in this reſpect. But there are other caſes, in which this compaſſionate diſpoſition ought to exert itſelf; where the circumſtances are a little different, and where ſome degree of attention and reflection is requiſite. I proceed, therefore, to obſerve

II. That the errors and imprudencies, to which the human race are liable thro' their own voluntary neglect, will, likewiſe, afford us an occaſion of exerciſing the duty which is recommended in the text.

You will readily allow, my brethren, that mankind in general, behold this claſs of evils with very different ſentiments from thoſe which are excited by the former. Experience ſufficiently teſtifies, that the perſons who are the moſt inclined to mourn with the unhappy mourner, are the warmeſt in their cenſures of error and imprudence. And the reaſon is evident. The ſame quick-

neſs of feeling, which leads them to ſympathize with the unfortunate, incites them to blame and condemn the faulty. In the former caſe, they are entirely right; in the latter, they are partly wrong. For tho' voluntary error and imprudence produce, almoſt inſtinctively, the feeling of diſapprobation, they call, likewiſe, for an emotion of another kind. And if we had ſufficiently imbibed the tender compaſſionate diſpoſition which is enjoined in the New Teſtament, the latter emotion would, undoubtedly, be predominant.

For ſurely, my brethren, if we reflect at all on the matter, we muſt be convinced, that voluntary error and imprudence are ſome of the moſt proper objects of our tendereſt pity. For what is it, that we compaſſionate in the ſituation and circumſtances of our fellow creatures? Is it not the diſtreſs to which they are liable, in their paſſage thro' life? And are not thoſe events the moſt worthy of our ſympathetic concern, which are productive of the moſt aggravated

pains and ſorrows? Ought we not, then, to be pitiful in a peculiar degree, when we perceive the conſequences of imprudence and voluntary error? For do they not occaſion a remorſe, which hath pains peculiar to itſelf, and which the heavieſt unavoidable misfortunes cannot inflict? Where would be the harm, then, if the ready tongue of cenſure were ſtopped in its courſe by the mute eloquence of the tear of pity? Where would be the inconſiſtence with our religious character, if our diſapprobation of the fault were entirely abſorbed by our concern for the unhappy defaulter? Are not we commanded to *bear one another's burdens, and ſo fulfil the law of Chriſt*? And ſhould we not feel for thoſe, who have been ſeduced into miſtakes, to which we are all equally liable; and which are the common lot of human nature in its preſent ſtate of probation?

If we had properly learned Chriſt, my brethren, I am perſuaded that we ſhould behold the irregularities in the conduct of mankind with a compaſſionate eye.—That

feeling diſpoſition, which is commanded by the goſpel, would direct our attention to every favourable circumſtance, and would lead us to ſearch carefully for every excuſe, which may poſſibly be urged in alleviation of a fault.—We ſhould conſider the nature of the temptations, by which our fellow creatures are led aſtray from the path of propriety; and ſhould make every reaſonable allowance for the aſtoniſhing weakneſs, which is too often diſcovered in the human mind. —We ſhould draw a veil of loving kindneſs over the imperfections of a brother.—— Where we cannot approve, we ſhould be ſilent.——And if at any time we gave vent to our ſentiments, we ſhould do it with tenderneſs and delicacy; inſtead of aggravating, we ſhould extenuate; inſtead of ſeverely judging and ſternly condemning, we ſhould pity the error and ſympathize with the affliction which it hath occaſioned——We ſhould retain the warmth of our diſapprobation within our own breaſts, and ſuffer only our compaſſionate feeling to be manifeſt to the world. For it is the latter alone which can confer upon us any great degree

of honor. The former is chiefly inſtinctive; and, tho' proper and right, is ſcarcely entitled to praiſe. Whereas the latter is the produce of reflection and reaſon; it is the effect of an active principle of benevolence; and can proceed only from an habitual inclination to brotherly love. In this caſe, then, pity becomes one of the moſt exalted of the ſocial virtues; it is an exertion and not a conſtitution of the ſoul; it teſtifies that we have formed proper ideas of our duty to mankind, and have imbibed the ſpirit of a genuine chriſtian. We may add

III. That the vices of our fellow creatures will demand our pity in a ſtill higher degree.

If the effects of imprudence and voluntary error be found ſufficiently unhappy to excite our compaſſion, what, my brethren, ought to be our feelings when we behold the aggravated crimes of mankind, and are witneſſes of the inexpreſſible miſery, which they occaſion? I know not how it is, but it is certain, that we are all too ready to be-

hold the vices of our fellow men with a cool indifference of diſapprobation. Sometimes, indeed, when their fatal conſequences are immediate, the wretchedneſs of the delinquent gives birth to ſentiments of pity. And when numbers fall ſacrifices to the enormous wickedneſs of an individual, our minds are ſtrongly irritated by indignation and reſentment. But, in other caſes, the crimes of men are treated as objects, in which we are not intereſted; and we can perceive an infatuated fellow immortal calmly perſiſting in a courſe of irreligion, without any lively concern.

And yet, my brethren, where is there another object ſo truly pitiable? When we lament the pains of the ſons and daughters of affliction, we do not *ſorrow as thoſe that are without hope*; we know that the *ſpirit of man can ſuſtain his infirmity*; and are encouraged by the recollection, that they will enjoy their *goods things* in ſome future period, when they receive their *recompence of reward*. When we are grieved at the unhappy conſequences of imprudence, we are

not entirely deſtitute of ſolace; we call to mind, that the evil effects of imprudence are often only of ſhort duration; and we are naturally induced to hope, that where the heart is not corrupt, a few irregularities of conduct will be gradually corrected. But when habitual vice preſents itſelf before our eyes, what is there to alleviate our ſorrow, or to diminiſh our pity? We ſee a fellow creature, poſſeſſed of the ſame feelings as ourſelves, madly incurring the diſpleaſure of his creator; deſerting that boundleſs happineſs, for which he was produced; and expoſing himſelf to the moſt poignant miſery of which an intelligent agent is capable. If the frequency of the appearance had not worn away the acuteneſs of our feelings, we ſhould turn with horror from the ſight, and be unable to ſupport the piteous emotions of our hearts. And the more we reflect on the importance of piety and virtue—the more we cultivate that compaſſionate diſpoſition, which is recommended in the goſpel, the more lively will be our ſorrow on account of the folly and inſanity of men—the more deeply ſhall we be affected by the wretched-

neſs, which they are calling down upon their own heads. *I beheld the tranſgreſſors*, ſaith David, *and was grieved; rivers of waters run down mine eyes, becauſe they keep not thy law.* And the great author and finiſher of our faith was peculiarly eminent in this reſpect. The ſtupidity and obduracy of his countrymen were the perpetual ſources of his lamentation, and ſometimes forced themſelves upon his mind with an uncommon vehemence. Witneſs his abrupt and affecting apoſtrophe to the city of Jeruſalem at the end of one of his diſcourſes. *O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the prophets and ſtoneſt them which are ſent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!* Witneſs the lively compaſſion, which he felt for this ungrateful city, when he was about to make that triumphant entry into it, which was the prelude to his ſufferings and death. *When he was come near*, ſaith the hiſtorian, *he beheld the city and wept over it; ſaying, if thou hadſt known, even thou at leaſt in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace——but now they are hid from thine eyes!*

Such, my brethren, is the pity, which we ought to feel for the pains, imprudencies and vices of our fellow creatures: ſo extenſive is the precept, which is contained in the text. We have treated it ſolely as a perſonal virtue; and as a diſpoſition of the mind. Its influence on the perſons, by whom it is occaſioned, was foreign to our deſign; and would have detained us too long for the limits of our diſcourſe. As a perſonal virtue, however, it recommends itſelf ſtrongly to our cultivation. For is it not highly neceſſary to our happineſs, that our internal diſpoſition ſhould be accommodated to the ſituation and circumſtances in which we are placed? *Let this mind, then, be in us, which was alſo in Chriſt Jeſus. Let us be pitiful, having compaſſion one of another.* Let us *weep for them who are in trouble; put on, as the elect of God, holy, and beloved, bowels of mercy; and remember them,* who ſuffer adverſity—who are drawn away by imprudence—or who fall a prey to vice, *as being ourſelves alſo in the body.*

SERMON V.

ON

COURTESY.

SERMON V.

On Courteſy.

1 PET. iii. 8.

Be Courteous.

THE inſtructions of the new teſtament, my brethren, are ſuperior to every other ſyſtem of morality in the world. Their grand deſign is to raiſe us above the preſent tranſitory ſtate, and to fit us for an happy entrance into the regions of immortality. Hence they teach us to place our affections on things that are above, and not excluſively on the things of the earth; hence they remind us of the nobility of our intellectual nature; and hence they encourage us to entertain hopes and expectations, which the preſent world is, by no means, able to ſatisfy.

But, notwithſtanding they chiefly relate to another world, they are not entirely confined to it. The world in which we are now ſituated, obtains a conſiderable ſhare of

their regard. They are deſigned to ſecure our preſent, as well as our future happineſs. Whatever hath a tendency to promote the true enjoyment of our bodies—whatever is likely to contribute to our ſocial pleaſure, and to render our intercourſe with our fellow men free, eaſy, and comfortable, is pointed out, recommended, and enforced by Chriſt and his apoſtles. I do not know, that there is a ſingle, uſeful precept omitted, with reſpect to any part of the conduct of life. The grand, eſſential duties of morality are repeatedly enforced—the dictates of prudence are clearly diſplayed—the principles of decorum are finely exhibited—and even the little elegancies of demeanour, which conſtitute the beauty of poliſhed ſociety, are not forgotten.

The epiſtle, from which our text is taken, affords a ſtriking proof of the truth of theſe obſervations. The apoſtle firſt reminds his fellow chriſtians of the *inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, to the lively hope of which they were begotten again, by the reſurrection of Chriſt*

from the dead. He then applies this important doctrine to the purpoſes of practical religion; and diſplays at large, the effects which it ought to produce on the general conduct. He inculcates a ſteady imitation of the ever bleſſed God; forbids all malice, guile, and hypocriſy in our intercourſe with the world; and enjoins that purity of heart, which is inconſiſtent with the inordinate indulgence of ſenſual appetite. Having thus laid down the general principles of our duty to our creator, our fellow creatures and ourſelves, he deſcends to a more particular enumeration of the offices of ſocial life; he ſpecifies the reciprocal duties of ſubjects and governors, ſervants and maſters, wives and huſbands; and then, to ſum up the whole —to give the finiſhing ſtroke to the perfection of the chriſtian character, he ſtrongly recommends that courteous diſpoſition— that true politeneſs of manners, which hath ſo often been excluſively appropriated to the perſons, who maintain an habitual intercourſe with the faſhionable world.

The intrinſic beauty, and agreeable effects of this courteous behaviour, are ſufficiently evident to every ſuperficial obſerver. We admire the men in whom it is found: we do more than admire them; we eſteem their characters, and love their perſons; we are fond of their ſociety, and ſolicitous to acquire their friendſhip. There is ſcarcely any thing which ſteals upon the ſoul ſo imperceptibly, and yet ſo irreſiſtibly, as this charming courteſy of manners. It adds a nameleſs grace to every action; gives a meaning to every trifling geſture; and renders the whole deportment pleaſing and attractive. It is ſufficient of itſelf to atone for a thouſand deficiences; and, notwithſtanding our utmoſt attempts to the contrary, will always cover a multitude of ſins.

But though its influence hath been thus univerſally felt and acknowledged, it hath, I know not how or why, been conſidered only as an agreeable qualification, and not as an indiſpenſible duty. The moraliſt hath, for the moſt part, overlooked it in his ſyſtem; or forborn to mention it, as if he

thought it were entirely out of his province. Hence it hath been left to the natural temper, or accidentally acquired diſpoſition of every individual. It hath depended on the caprice of time, chance, and circumſtance. It hath been a humour, rather than a habit; and hath ſeldom been exerted in that uniform manner, which is the characteriſtic of genuine virtue.

And while the moraliſt hath thus neglected it, the chriſtian hath too often done more. He hath, not unfrequently, acted, as if it were totally at variance with the ſpirit of his religion. An affected alienation from the affairs and men of the world, hath, as might juſtly have been expected, produced a gloomy unſociability of temper, and a forbidding moroſeneſs of behaviour. Irrational ideas of the nature of the divine communications and favours have engendered ſpiritual pride; and where pride of any kind hath taken up her reſidence, thence the gentle ſpirit of courteſy is for ever excluded. An attachment to ſuppoſed eſſential articles of faith hath afforded abundant cauſe for the

breach of the precept in the text; for of all claſſes of men, the furious bigot is the moſt uncourteous. Hence the world hath been peſtered with the wrangling controverſies of irritated ſectaries; perſonal reflections have been introduced to conceal the want or the weakneſs of argument; and while the honour of chriſtianity hath been zealouſly pretended, its ſpirit and temper have been entirely forgotten.

But ſurely, my brethren, theſe miſchiefs muſt have ariſen from a very partial regard to the ſacred writings. For the writings of the evangeliſts and apoſtles univerſally inculcate a different diſpoſition. A courteſy of manners ought not to be the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of the faſhionable world—it is ſomething more than a pleaſing embelliſhment of life—it ariſes from our mutual relations to each other, as men—and ſhould, by all means, be the uniform produce of our principles, as chriſtians. For our buſineſs as men—our duty as chriſtians, is to be happy ourſelves, and to contribute to the happineſs of others. He that

ſecures theſe two important ends, the moſt wiſely and effectually, is the moſt excellent man, and the moſt exemplary chriſtian. Whatever courſe of conduct hath any tendency, either direct or remote, either ſmall or great, to diminiſh the happineſs of ourſelves or others is, therefore, indiſputably wrong, in proportion to the extent of its influence. And if we can prove, that an uncourteous diſpoſition, and a rough, diſobliging behaviour are likely to produce this effect, we ſhall fully demonſtrate the propriety and indiſpenſible obligation of the apoſtolic injunction in the text.

Suffer then, my brethren, the word of exhortation. The ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe is, by no means, a matter of little importance. It extends equally to every ſituation in life, and ought to be the habitual principle of our conduct, with reſpect to our equals, our inferiors, and ſuperiors. There is not one, therefore, in this aſſembly, by whom this amiable duty may not be practiſed. For we are all ſurrounded by our equals, and are moſt of us connected both with inferiors and ſuperiors.

I. There is a wide field for the exercise of this christian grace, in our intercourse with our equals.

It is certain, that all men are originally equal to each other. Every one is lord of himself, and is subject to no controul, unless he violate any of the rights of his neighbour, which are, in every respect, as sacred as his own. But the institutions of civil government have, in some measure, destroyed this primitive equality. The partial liberty of the individual hath given way to the general safety and advantage. Compacts have been formed, and various degrees of subordination established, by which the conveniences and improvements of life have been greatly encreased. Some small alteration, therefore, hath been introduced with respect to the rights of men in a social state. And their reciprocal duties must be determined by the precise nature of the relations, which they bear to each other. Under the present head of discourse, however, it is unnecessary to pay them any attention. For with respect to those, who sustain a similar

character, and are placed in the ſame ſituation of civil life, they have undergone no variation. They are the duties of men to men, and muſt be fixed by the general principles of human nature, and the reciprocal intereſts of the ſeveral individuals. And if we try the precept in the text by theſe ſtandards, we ſhall find that its authority is unalterable and unlimited.

For what can be more agreeable to the general principles of human nature, than that courteous and obliging demeanour which we are now recommending? Do not the feelings of our hearts clearly indicate, that we are brethren? Are not kindneſs and a deſire of giving pleaſure the brighteſt ornaments, and ſome of the moſt eſſential properties of the fraternal character? Should not our conduct in ſociety clearly diſcover, that we wiſh each other well—that we deſire to conciliate the affection of our fellow men—and are happy in the idea of obliging and being obliged? And can theſe deſirable ends be obtained by a petulance of temper—a moroſeneſs of behaviour—or a gloomy

reſerve? No, my brethren; *by their fruits you ſhall know them*, is a maxim, which may be univerſally applied; and a general courteſy of manners is the natural ſign of a truly benevolent heart.

The engaging diſpoſition which is the ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe, is alſo highly favourable to the reciprocal intereſt of individuals. How eaſily would the buſineſs of life be tranſacted, if every one were open, ingenuous, and friendly in his behaviour? How many miſunderſtandings would be avoided? How quickly would diſputes be ended, which are ſometimes the labour and vexation of years? Whoſe intereſt, my brethren, would you moſt chearfully labour to promote—the man's of a courteous diſpoſition, or the churliſh Nabal's, who is ſuch a ſon of Belial, that no one can ſpeak unto him? Are you not ready to go—to run—to fly at the requeſt of the former? Is not the graceful motion of his hand, or the benignant glance of his eye, ſufficient to attract your notice, and to enſure your compliance with his deſires? In the exerciſes of

friendſhip and the relaxations of ſociety, who is ſo compleatly agreeable as the courteous man? The habitual turn of his manners is viſible in all his actions—it enables him to diſcharge the ſerious duties of life with advantage—to trifle with eaſe and good humour—to confer an obligation with delicacy—and to receive one, with that dignity of gratitude which is naturally produced by a conſciouſneſs, that *he* would have done exactly the ſame, if he had been placed in the ſituation of his obliger.

And is it not, my brethren, worth ſome degree of attention to form a habit, which is thus univerſally pleaſing and beneficial? It is, however, as eaſy in the acquiſition, as it is uſeful in the practice. A proper ſenſe of the real nature of our relation to our fellow men, and a deſire of obliging thoſe with whom we are connected, are abundantly ſufficient to produce that courteſy of demeanour, which is ſo ornamental to the man and the chriſtian. A truly benevolent mind is the only proper foundation for a

general politeneſs of manners. When the heart is under the influence of the kind affections, an engaging urbanity will be viſible in the conduct. The chriſtian, therefore, who, by his profeſſion and character, is the friend of mankind, ought, undoubtedly, to be eminent for the gentleneſs and courteſy of his diſpoſition. And we are to obſerve

II. That he will exerciſe this amiable virtue, not only to his equals, but to thoſe alſo, who are placed in the inferior ſtations of life.

The different ranks and relations, which have ariſen from the inſtitution of civil ſociety, have occaſioned ſeveral new claſſes of duties. It is the part of the governor and the maſter to command—of the ſubject and the ſervant to obey. But even theſe new obligations have, by no means, annulled or reſtrained the natural duty, which we are now recommending. There are, in reality, additional arguments to be urged, in favour of a courteous diſpoſition to inferiors.

When men are, in every reſpect, equal to each other, a high ſenſe of natural liberty, which, perhaps, is not always and altogether to be condemned, may eaſily be carried to a culpable extreme, and will ſometimes end in a ſullen haughtineſs of ſpirit. But when the relation of ſuperior and inferior hath once taken place, this ſullen haughtineſs of ſpirit cannot plead as any alleviation of its guilt, that it ariſes from the *exceſs* of a principle *which, perhaps, is not always and altogether to be condemned.* For the inferior is, more or leſs, in the power of his ſuperior; and to oppreſs, inſult, or even to behave uncourteouſly to a dependent, is ungenerous, little, and unmanly. The urbanity of the gentleman and the chriſtian will appear as viſibly in his behaviour to his ſervants, as in his intercourſe with perſons of his own rank.

And it is the ſtriking characteriſtic of this commendable courteſy, that it preſerves, in the compleateſt manner, the difference of relation, and yet renders the inferior party inattentive to the humiliating circumſtances

of his condition. It is the happy medium between a degrading familiarity and a lordly pride. It is equally diſcouraging to an unſufferable contempt on the one hand, and a ſervile fear on the other. It inſpires a rational confidence, connected with an affectionate reverence. It muſt, therefore, be highly uſeful to the ſuperior, as it hath a tendency to ſecure the attachment and fidelity of the inferior. And it is unneceſſary to mention how much it will be conducive to the happineſs of the dependent. A kind look and a gentle expreſſion—how do they chear the heart, lighten labour, and give ſome of the charms of freedom to ſervitude! "Is he not obliged to obey my commands?" is a queſtion which when a man puts it to himſelf, muſt, ſurely, ſmoothe his brow, produce an encouraging benignity in his eye, and ſoften his voice to a tone of gentleneſs. Subjection, dependence, and manual labour are the lot of mankind in the lower departments of life; and theſe are ſufficient trials of their patience and ſubmiſſion to the diſpenſations of providence. The harſh language of ſeverity need not be added to in-

creaſe their inconveniences and depreſs their ſpirits. No, my brethren, let the mild accents of courteſy rather exhilarate their minds; make them remember that they alſo are men; and lead them to rely on the goodneſs of the common parent of all.

I will juſt add

III. That a courteous diſpoſition will appear with peculiar advantage in its behaviour to perſons in a ſuperior ſtation.

But here, perhaps it may be ſuggeſted, that however properly the courteſy we are recommending, may be applied to equals and inferiors, it will, in the preſent caſe, be nothing leſs than a preſumptuous familiarity. And it is certain, that it muſt accommodate itſelf to the different nature of the relation, and will, conſequently, undergo a ſmall alteration in its appearance. Its general character, however, will continue exactly the ſame. It will ſtill retain that openneſs and benevolence, which will clearly in-

dicate its original. The man, who is courteous and condeſcendingly kind to inferiors, will never debaſe himſelf by a mean ſervility to perſons of a more elevated rank. For it is an undeniable maxim, that a cringing and a tyranical diſpoſition are inſeparably connected; or, in the nervous language of the Poet,

He that flatters the blown up fool above him,
Will uſe his power to cruſh the wretch beneath him.

The courteſy of the chriſtian is equally a ſtranger to both theſe odious extremes. As it will not permit him *to provoke* his honeſt dependant *to wrath*, it forbids him alſo to employ the adulation which may ſoothe the pride of the elevated vulgar, but will excite an inconceivable diſguſt in the generous mind. In all his engagements and connections, he will remember the duties of a man to his brethren; a liberality of manners will be the principal characteriſtic of his conduct; and the general courteſy, with which he treats all ranks of men, will procure him the reverence of his inferiors, the

eſteem of his equals, and the admiration of his ſuperiors.

Obſerve then, my brethren, the excellence of the precept in the text; ſtudy its extent and obligation; and cultivate the diſpoſition, which it recommends, not merely as a polite accompliſhment, but as a moral and chriſtian duty. Finally, *be ye all of one mind, having compaſſion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrarywiſe, bleſſing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye ſhould inherit a bleſſing.*

SERMON VI.

ON

SYMPATHETIC JOY.

SERMON VI.

ON

SYMPATHETIC JOY.

SERMON VI.

On ſympathetic joy.

ROM. xii. 15.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice.

HAPPINESS, my brethren, is the moſt pleaſing idea, which can engage the attention of the human mind. And there is nothing which has ſo great a tendency to elevate and delight the ſoul as a belief that the univerſe is governed by a being, who is attentive to the welfare of its inhabitants. We may, then, always indulge ourſelves in a ſeries of enlivening reflections; for we are led to this concluſion by an obſervation of the works of nature, of the diſpenſations of providence, and of the ſpirit of the divine laws. The ſupreme being is continually ſhowering down upon us innumerable bleſſings; bleſſings which are independent of our ſelves, and which we could not poſſibly procure by our utmoſt attention, care, and diligence. But theſe bleſſings, tho' extremely valuable, and indeed, abſolutely neceſſary for the preſerva-

tion of our lives, are by no means ſo exquiſitely pleaſing, as thoſe which are procured by our own prudence and activity. Hence we are made, in ſome meaſure, the maſters of our own happineſs; our enjoyments are the reſult of our own free choice, and depend upon the conformity of our lives with the will of God. And if we examine the rules of conduct, which are ſuggeſted to us by our intellectual faculties, and which are confirmed and enforced by the ſacred writings, we ſhall find them an abundant ſource of felicity. They are all calculated to procure us that ſweet ſelf-ſatisfaction—that divine complacency of mind, which the *ſtranger* to religion and goodneſs *intermedleth not with.*

Among the various precepts of the new teſtament, there is no one, that is more ſublime in its nature, or more extenſive in its operation, than that which is contained in the words of the text. *Rejoice with them that do rejoice.* It is a principle, on which a general ſyſtem of ſocial conduct may be founded; it contains in it every thing that

is neceſſary for the regulation of our behaviour to our fellow creatures; and were it practiſed in its full extent, would raiſe the ſtate of civil ſociety to its higheſt poſſible perfection. On this account, it was well worthy the attention of a divine legiſlator, whoſe grand object was the promotion of univerſal felicity; and whoſe principal mean for the attainment of this deſirable end, was the encouragement of univerſal benevolence.

And whether we apply the precept in the text to the mean or the end, we ſhall have juſt reaſon to admire its excellence.

I. A full obſervance of this goſpel precept is nothing leſs than the completion of univerſal benevolence.

For, my brethren, let us examine the ſeveral ſtages of this virtuous affection, from its firſt appearance and loweſt degree, to its lateſt improvement and perfect maturity; and we ſhall find reaſon to acknowledge, that a ſympathy with the proſperity of others,

is its nobleſt and ultimate exertion. The man, who is deſtitute of pity when human diſtreſs is preſented to his view, is univerſally eſteemed cruel and unnatural. To be able to behold the woes of a fellow creature, without any ſympathetic emotion—to hear the ſighs and groans of languiſhing misfortune, without wiſhing to adminiſter relief, would be an inconteſtible evidence of the want of every benevolent principle; it is the mark of a monſter and not of a man, and is juſtly the object of univerſal horror and indignation. For the wiſe and bounteous author of our frame hath given us an inſtinctive direction to the exerciſe of charitable compaſſion. It is impoſſible for the language of grief to aſſail our ears, and not, at the ſame time, to penetrate deep into our ſouls. We are ſenſibly affected by every accent of woe, and feel ourſelves impelled, by an involuntary principle, to exert our ſelves to the utmoſt, for the removal of its cauſe. The whole human race, however diverſified their characters may be, are in ſome degree ſubject to this inſtinctive ſympathy. The wretch, who is principally di-

rected by the ſelfiſh principle, cannot wholly diveſt himſelf of this ſudden and unpremeditated compaſſion. The influence of long-contracted habit is not always ſufficient to over-come the powerful impulſe of that amiable conſtitution, which mankind have univerſally received from their great creator. A life that is ſpent in continual depredations upon others, either by the ſecret machinations of deſigning avarice, or the more manly attacks of undiſguiſed robbery, is, nevertheleſs, ſometimes diverſified with exertions of genuine pity; and the property, which hath been unjuſtly obtained by fraud or violence, is devoted to the relief of ſupplicating miſery.

Here then, we diſcover the loweſt degree of ſocial affection. In theſe inſtances, it is inſtinct and not reaſon, which ſoftens the heart, moiſtens the eyes, and gives immediate energy to the hands. And ſo far it is neceſſary for us to be directed by ſomething more quick and forcible than cool reflection and patien t deliberation. For many of the

calamities of human life are ſo ſudden in their attack, and ſo ſpeedy in their effects, that we ſhould often be loſt without inſtant aſſiſtance. Inſtant aſſiſtance, therefore, is ſecured by the conſtitution of our minds. On theſe melancholy occaſions, every one feels the emotions of pity; and every one is ſolicitous to remove or alleviate the diſtreſs.

But the province of inſtinct does not extend beyond abſolute neceſſity. In all other caſes, we muſt be regulated by reaſon, and muſt aſpire after the character of poſitive virtue. Now virtue is the effect of a well informed underſtanding—a proper regard to duty—and a deliberate conformity with an acknowledged law of conduct. It does not conſiſt in a few unconnected actions; but in an habitual inclination to that which is good, and a regular reſolution to practice it. If we wiſh, therefore, to be poſſeſſed of ſocial virtue, we muſt cultivate juſt ideas of our relation to our fellow men, aſſiſt them from principle, and preſerve a conſtant, uniform, and univerſal regard to their welfare. And what is this but to ſympathize with

their happineſs as well as their miſery; or, in the words of the text, to *rejoice with them that do rejoice* as well as *weep with them that weep?*

And if this diſpoſition be properly formed, it will appear totally different from that illiberal ſelfiſhneſs, which flatters in the day of proſperity, but diſappears when the ſcene is reverſed, and attaches itſelf to ſome more fortunate object. The man who regulates his life by the apoſtolic precept, is not, like the gaudy inſect of the ſummer's ſun, terrified and put to flight by the ſtorm of adverſity; but continues faithful to his profeſſions in every ſituation; and teſtifies that the happineſs of his brethren, and not his own private advantage, is the principal cauſe of his ſocial attention. His conduct is directed by enlarged views of human nature, and ariſes from a liberal idea of the relations, which mankind mutually bear to each other. He conſiders himſelf, as a ſmall part of an immenſe whole; he cannot, therefore, detach his own intereſt from the

intereſt of others; but remembers, that his private welfare is blended with the general proſperity. On this account, wherever he diſcovers the appearance of happineſs, he finds a proper occaſion of rejoicing. The felicity of a fellow creature is well adapted to his mental taſte, and affords him as lively a pleaſure, as his corporeal ſenſes can poſſibly derive from any of the objects which are ſuited to their nature.

When the temper of the mind is thus formed, my brethren, what is there wanting to complete its ſocial character? In what important duty of public life will that man be deficient, who regards the happineſs of others as his own; and is habitually diſpoſed to *rejoice, with them that rejoice?* Will he neglect any of the tender offices of charity and compaſſion? Will he be a ſtranger to the obſcure retreats of wretched poverty? Will he deſert the bed of affliction, or turn a deaf ear to the complaints of the orphan? Will he ever avoid a ſcene of woe, for the ſake of viſiting the habitation of proſperity, and ecchoing the acclamations of trium-

phant ſucceſs? It cannot be, my brethren. The aſſiſtance which is afforded by others in conſequence of an inſtinctive impulſe, will be ſuggeſted to him by the powerful conviction of duty. For the eye which is ſuffuſed with the delicious tear of pleaſure when it beholds a ſcene of felicity, can never repreſs the tear of pity when miſery is preſented to its view. An ardent deſire of univerſal happineſs will diffuſe itſelf, thro' all the connections of life; and ſecure a beneficence of conduct in every poſſible ſituation. There are no affairs which may not be committed to the management of ſuch a perſon, with implicit confidence; there is no truſt, to which he will be unfaithful; there is no advantage, which he will take of ignorance and inattention. For whenever he occaſions uneaſineſs to others, he immediately impairs his own happineſs. You are, therefore, always ſecure of every aſſiſtance in his power; for while he continues to love himſelf, he muſt continue to be ſolicitous for your welfare.

And

And what, my brethren, can be more agreeable to the pureſt deciſions of human nature, than the temper which we are now recommending? It muſt be acknowledged, that we are not prompted to it by an involuntary inſtinct; for the ſtate of proſperity is ſuch, as does not ſtand in need of aſſiſtance; and it might continue to exiſt, tho' it found no one to ſympathize with its joys. But then, we cannot avoid feeling, that ſuch a ſympathy is virtuous and becoming. When we rejoice ourſelves, we naturally expect our friends to rejoice with us; and if we perceive them cold, and inſenſible to our happineſs, do we not cenſure them, as deſtitute of benevolent affection?

This propenſity of the human mind is beautifully and forcibly diſplayed in the parables of the loſt ſheep and piece of ſilver. *What man of you*, ſaith our Saviour, *having an hundred ſheep, if he loſe one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderneſs, and go after that which is loſt, till he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his ſhoulders rejoicing; and when he cometh home,*

he calleth together his neighbours, ſaying unto them, rejoice with me, for I have found my ſheep which was loſt. Either what woman having ten pieces of ſilver, if ſhe loſe one piece, doth not light a candle, and ſweep the houſe, and ſeek diligently, till ſhe find it? And when ſhe hath found it, ſhe calleth her friends and her neighbours together, ſaying, rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which was loſt.

And can we avoid perceiving, that it is our indiſpenſible duty to manifeſt the ſame ſympathizing joy, at the proſperity of our brethren, which we expect from them on ſimilar occaſions? What, moreover, can be more noble—what more worthy the attention of a generous mind, than that public-ſpirited diſpoſition, which exults at the appearance of human happineſs? Is it not to imitate the moſt amiable and pleaſing attribute of the Deity? For how can we entertain more honourable ideas of the ſupreme being, than by ſuppoſing him the benevolent friend of every living creature?

It is evident, then, that in whatever light we conſider the precept, which is enjoined in the text, we ſhall find it well calculated to produce that perfection of benevolence, which is ſo honourable to human nature, and, in all reſpects, ſo beneficial to ſociety. For as we propoſed to obſerve,

II. The profeſſed end of the chriſtian revelation cannot be better ſecured than by the encouragement of this generous affection.

It hath ſometimes been aſſerted, that the happineſs of the preſent life is an object, that was never immediately intended to be provided for, by the goſpel of Chriſt. But ſurely, my brethren, we ſhall be led to form a different concluſion, whether we conſider the nature of the human mind in general, or the precepts in particular, which have received the ſanction of a divine authority, and are publiſhed in the new teſtament for the direction of our conduct. For have not ſome objects a natural tendency to give us pleaſure, in all the ſtages of our exiſtence? And are not others, as naturally productive

of our miſery? If an obedience to the laws of chriſtianity, then, will ſecure our felicity in another world, muſt they not, on that account, be highly favourable to it in the preſent? Will not the ſame diſpoſitions and habits, which will hereafter be conducive to the peace of our minds, be attended by the ſame effects whenever they are formed and preſerved? And do we not, in fact, experience, that all the precepts of the new teſtament are highly ſalutary, in their immemediate operation? What, for inſtance, can have a better influence on the ſtate of human ſociety, than the ſympathetic joy with the happineſs of others, which we have found ſo agreeable to right reaſon, and the natural feelings of the human heart? Were this principle to direct our general conduct, and to be the diſtinguiſhing feature of our characters, how much would the felicity of life be encreaſed! how much more real ſatisfaction ſhould we derive from an intercourſe with our fellow creatures! All the malignant paſſions would be baniſhed from our breaſts; envy, rancour, and malice would never diſturb the tranquility of our

minds; the interference of intereſt would be forgotten; and an extenſive benevolence would diffuſe its gentle influence over our lives. What an inexhauſtible fund of happineſs ſhould we derive from a view of the bleſſings, which are continually beſtowed upon mankind by an indulgent providence! Our enjoyments would, by no means, depend entirely on the ſmall ſhare of objects, which fall into our own poſſeſſion, and acknowledge us for their excluſive maſters. All the acquiſitions of our friends, of our neighbours, of our fellow citizens and countrymen, would contribute to our pleaſure, and enlarge the ſphere of our felicity. Wherever the bounteous father of all hath diſtributed his favours, we ſhould find an occaſion of rejoicing. The external bleſſings of life, which are enjoyed by ſo many around us—the increaſe of fortune and honour—and the innumerable other delights, of which the human race are ſuſceptible, would all be collected within ourſelves; and give us a pleaſure, ſeldom leſs exquiſite, often much more refined, than the pleaſure of the real poſſeſſors. Into how many ſmil-

ing families might we enter, and partake of their general happineſs! With what ſatisfaction might we behold their domeſtic and friendly freedom; and contemplate the nature of thoſe ſacred ties, which are the ſources of ſuch exquiſite feelings! How might we rejoice with them in the felicity, which they derive from the tender names of wife and huſband, mother and father, ſiſter and brother! And how ſweet would be our ſympathy with the delicate ſentiments and amiable refinements of natural affection!

Believe me, my brethren, we might add much to the happineſs of our lives, were we to conduct our ſocial intercourſe in this laudable manner. What delightful peace would poſſeſs our ſouls, if all our views of mankind were thus benevolent and ſympathetic! How noble would be our feelings, if they were thus the lively expreſſions of the feelings of our fellow creatures! Our minds would reſemble the auguſt expanſe of ocean in the calm tranquility of a ſummer's evening; when there is not a breath of air to

diſturb the ſmoothneſs of its ſurface; and all the beauties of heaven are painted on its boſom. Whereas, the diſlikes, the jealouſies, and envy, which ariſe from the want of a proper ſocial temper, too often render us like the ungovernable ſea, when it is agitated by raging tempeſts, becomes dark and horrible in its appearance, and is incapable of reflecting the images of objects.

And, what can be a more ſtriking proof of folly, than thus to give up ſome of the moſt delicate pleaſures, of which the human heart is ſuſceptible; and to expoſe ourſelves to the various pains, which are produced by the malignant affections? The precept in the text is, therefore, highly worthy of our attention. For if we regulate our lives by the principles of chriſtianity, we ſhall raiſe our ſocial joys to the higheſt point of perfection. The more we attend to the benevolent ſyſtem of morals, which is contained in the new teſtament, the more ſhall we be delighted with human happineſs—the more ſhall we be ſolicitous to encreaſe it—and the more ſhall we reſemble the parent of all

good. I repeat it, with the livelieſt pleaſure, that the religion of Jeſus is not only calculated to prepare its votaries for the happineſs of heaven, but alſo to increaſe their uſefulneſs and felicity in their preſent exiſtence. The principles, which conſtitute its ſum and ſubſtance, have a direct tendency to refine the mind; to purge it from every hoſtile paſſion; and to render it the friend of the human race. I rejoice, therefore, that I am now ſpeaking to the profeſſors of chriſtianity; and that my arguments cannot be without effect, ſince they are addreſſed to perſons, who, if they underſtand their own religion, muſt feel their obligation to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, and to *weep with them that weep*.

SERMON VII.

ON

RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION.

SERMON VII.

On religious converſation.

MALACHI iii. 16.

Then they that feared the Lord, ſpake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

IT is a juſt obſervation, that the character of a man may eaſily be known by the perſons, with whom he chooſes to aſſociate; and the manner in which he ſpends his time, when he is engaged with his uſual companions. For tho' the ſocial principle is natural to the human breaſt, and will always ſtrongly exert itſelf in every ſituation, it is chiefly directed by the prevailing diſpoſition of the mind; and acts with the greateſt facility and vigour, when it meets with a perfect ſimilarity of temper. And it is not difficult for any one to pleaſe his peculiar taſte, amidſt the almoſt infinite variety of characters, which may be met with in the world. Thus we find, that in every

populous and civilized country, thoſe who are votaries of the ſame arts, and who purſue the ſame ſcheme of life, naturally form themſelves into diſtinct ſocieties: in which, they converſe on their favourite ſubjects; freely communicate their private ſentiments; and contribute to their mutual pleaſure and improvement. It is, likewiſe, a melancholy truth, that the vicious and profane always ſelect companions of the ſame complexion with themſelves; and aſſemble together for the free indulgence of their irreligious diſpoſitions. At theſe aſſemblies, the tongue of the ſcorner claims an unlimited indulgence of its ſhameleſs licentiouſneſs—the blaſphemer utters his ſhocking impieties—the malicious publiſhes his ſlanderous tale—and the lips of violence emit their dreadful execrations. The ſons of hell are known by the tenor of their converſation; *out of the abundance of their hearts their mouths ſpeak*; and their whole ſocial intercourſe ſufficiently indicates the origin, nature, and tendency of their intimate connection.

May we not juſtly expect, then, that the partizans of virtue ſhould be drawn together by the bands of love, and anxiouſly deſire the advantage of a frequent converſation with each other? What ſhould we think of a man, who affected to be influenced by a proper ſenſe of religion, and yet preferred the company of the avowed profligate, to an improving connection with the friend of good morals? Is it likely, that the wolf and the lamb ſhould feed together?—or that the peaceful ox ſhould ſeek the den of the ravenous leopard? Can a well regulated palate nauſeate the taſte of its natural food, and devour with avidity a deadly poiſon? Or is it poſſible, that the ardent admirer of ſcience ſhould avoid the ſociety of his brother philoſophers; and herd, for life, with the profeſſed deſpiſers of every intellectual improvement? It is certain, then, that a ſound underſtanding will immediately diſcern the difference between the righteous and the wicked; between him that ſerveth God and him that ſerveth him not. It is, alſo, an undeniable truth, that they that *fear the Lord will often ſpeak one to another*; and they are

aſſured for their encouragement, that *the Lord hearkens and hears it, and a book of remembrance is written before him, for them that fear the Lord, and think upon his name.*

There is, however, ſome reaſon to apprehend, that the ſocial intercourſe of the wiſe and good is not productive of thoſe beneficial effects, which might juſtly be expected; and I ſhall not be thought uncharitable tho' I inſinuate, that religion and virtue are, by no means, the faſhionable topics of converſation. The friends of virtue themſelves too generally betray a culpable negligence in this reſpect. They, often, by their own example, give a ſanction to unprofitable impertinences; and it is well, if they do not ſometimes borrow the language of the ſons of Belial, and incautiouſly promote an intereſt, which, in the hour of recollection, is the object of their utter abhorrence. There is indeed, a prevailing diſinclination to ſubjects of a religious nature; and they are ſo generally connected with the ideas of dulneſs and melancholy, that a well bred man is afraid of offering a ſingle hint concerning

them, to a mixed company, leſt he ſhould damp the general vivacity, and be avoided as an enemy to chearfulneſs.

And it muſt be confeſſed, that this is greatly owing to the improper manner, in which ſerious converſation is frequently conducted; and the unfavourable ſubjects, which are generally choſen, by thoſe who would willingly be thought the warmeſt votaries of religion. So that this reſpectable perſonage, hath ſome reaſon to complain, that her *greateſt enemies are thoſe of her own houſhold.* For they repreſent her as the patroneſs of continual melancholy; the friend of ſighs and of groans; and the diſapprover of mirth and of good humour. Inſtead of revering her as the child of nature, and the parent of pleaſure, they labour in her ſervice, with a ſullen gloom, and treat her as the offſpring of ſuperſtition, and the producer of the ſpleen. Hence, in all their converſations on religious ſubjects, the voice of joy is ſeldom heard,—the pleaſing ſmile is carefully avoided—and the ſprightly ſally entirely excluded. All their ideas are dark, gloomy,

and horrible; their conceptions of the deity and his works are diſcouraging and melancholy; and their affrighted imaginations are perpetually creating

"*Gorgons and Hydras and Chimæras dire.*"

They conſider the religious character as unconnected with the preſent life—affect an entire alienation from worldly enjoyments—expatiate on the vanity of all corporeal objects—inveigh againſt the natural wickedneſs of the human heart—and aſſert, with bitterneſs of ſoul, and ſolemnity of countenance, that *to die* is far more deſirable than *to live.* If their converſation ever aſſume any vivacity or ſpirit, it is when they are employed on ſome intricate point of ſpeculation, and are ſettling the orthodoxy of their fellow chriſtians: for they imagine that much of the eſſence of religion conſiſts in a proper belief of ſpeculative principles, and always ſuppoſe that their own improvement in the chriſtian life bears an exact proportion to the ſtrength of their controverſial powers. They can ſcarcely indulge a ſocial hour with-

out perplexing their friends and companions with diſquiſitions, from which reaſon and common ſenſe are totally excluded—which have been ſtolen from the ponderous volumes of monkiſh ſchoolmen; and interwoven with the rational doctrines of chriſtianity by the united efforts of dulneſs, ignorance and bigotry. They ſilence you with a volley of aſſertions without the leaſt appearance of a proof; with concluſions which are not drawn from any juſt premiſes; and with diſtinctions, in which there is not any perceivable difference. They either deal out a myſtical gibberiſh which is unanſwerable becauſe it cannot be underſtood;

For true no meaning puzzles more than wit:

Or elſe they ſoar aloft, and madly pretend to diſcover the eternal decrees of the Deity: and while, like Milton's apoſtate ſpirits in the infernal regions,

They reaſon high,
Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge abſolute,
They find no end in wandering mazes loſt.

As long as religious converſation is conducted in this manner, and employed on theſe topics, it is no wonder that the greater part of mankind carefully avoid it; and content themſelves with the tranſient topics of the day. For it is not poſſible, that it ſhould afford any real entertainment, except to the few adepts in metaphyſical refinement, who have argued themſelves out of their reaſon; deadened all the finer feelings of their nature; and acquired a reliſh for impertinent quibble and and vexatious diſpute. And it is ſtill more deficient in point of utility. It produceth that knowledge, which engendereth ſtrife, to the total deſtruction of that charity, which is the bond of perfection; and, indeed, hath no tendency to improve the underſtanding, regulate the paſſions, or amend the heart.

But is it not eaſy, my brethren, frequently to give a religious turn to our converſation, and yet avoid theſe ſtriking inconveniences? Do not all the powers of our ſouls, our obſervation of the external world, and

the general tenor of the ſacred writings, point out a variety of intereſting and delightful topics, which may be introduced with great advantage to ourſelves and our companions? When *they that fear the Lord ſpeak one to another*, is it proper and becoming their character to confine their converſation to trifles, or perhaps to indulge the public appetite for ſcandal? Muſt they never throw out a hint, by which their prevailing ſentiments and temper may be diſcovered? Muſt the dread of pedantry or ſuperſtition always oblige them to conceal their thoughts; and keep their favourite and moſt frequent ideas to themſelves? Muſt the man of reflexion and the chriſtian be entirely ſunk in the fancied gentleman and man of the world?

Surely, my brethren, it would be no difficult matter to render our friendly converſation ſerious, and yet ſpirited—religious, and yet entertaining—uſeful, and yet polite. It is indeed aſtoniſhing that rational creatures ſhould ever be at a loſs for profitable

ſubjects of diſcourſe, when they are furniſhed with ſo many ſources, and bleſſed with ſuch favourable opportunities. With what ſpirit, entertainment, and utility might a converſation be maintained on the wonders of the viſible world, and the matchleſs ſkill of its almighty creator! Does not every object, which we behold, furniſh inconteſtible proofs of the infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs of the great former of the univerſe? Do they not ſtrongly impreſs all our corporeal ſenſes; preſent themſelves ſpontaneouſly to our minds; and demand our attention, with an authority which we cannot reſiſt? Are not all ſeaſons, and all companies equally favourable for an obſervation of ſome of the works of nature? Are we not perpetually converſant with earth and fire, air and water? Are we not ſpectators of the amazing variety of objects, which are produced by the different combinations of theſe original principles? And are not perſons of the meaneſt capacities acquainted with ſome of the advantages which they afford?

Here,

Here, then, is an inexhauſtible fund for the entertainment of the ſocial hour. The moſt uninformed mind cannot be at a loſs for topics of diſcourſe, ſince they are for ever preſent to its obſervation; and unavoidably engage its notice, in the diſcharge of the common buſineſs of life. And thoſe, who are placed in a higher rank, may render their mutual intercourſe ſtill more engaging, ſtriking, and beneficial. Their ſuperior knowledge will enable them to enter more deeply into the productions of the Deity; and to aſcertain, with greater exactneſs, their beauty, regularity and deſign. And if the genius of any one hath led him to the ſtudy of natural philoſophy, may he not, without incurring the character of impertinence or affectation, communicate his knowledge and reflections to his aſſociates? If, for inſtance, any accidental circumſtance occaſion the mention of the air, may he not pertinently enlarge on its ſingular properties and extenſive uſefulneſs? Would he defeat the end, or deſtroy the pleaſure of converſation, if he were briefly to explain its influence on the

life of animals and the growth of vegetables —if he were to obſerve that without it, fire cannot burn, ſounds be conveyed, or odours tranſmitted—if he were to take notice, that it is the cauſe of the winds, which are ſo neceſſary for the preſervation of health, the exiſtence of navigation, and the conſequent exchange of the productions of different climes—if he were to add, that it is the medium of the fruitful rain and refreſhing dew —and were to conclude his obſervations, by informing his companions, that we are indebted to it, for that uſeful twilight, which prevents the numerous inconveniences that would otherwiſe be occaſioned, by an inſtantaneous tranſition from midnight darkneſs to meridian day?

Would not a review of the varied utility of this inviſible body diffuſe a pleaſing ſenſation thro' a circle of friends; give a life and vigour to their converſation, and produce in them a principle of piety and gratitude to the ever bleſſed God? Is not this an admirable method of improving the judgment, and promoting the grand purpoſes of

human life? Will not they, that *fear the Lord*, naturally *ſpeak thus one to another*, celebrate in their friendly diſcourſe the great author of their being, and excite each other, to love him more and to ſerve him better? And may we not juſtly expect, that he will *hearken and hear it*, and give it a place *in the book of his remembrance*?

There are, moreover, many other topics, which will afford admirable matter for the employment of a ſocial hour. There is nothing that relates to the right conduct of life, the improvement of the human mind, and the acquiſition of virtue, which may not be introduced with great propriety in an aſſembly of excellent men. All the principles of morality and religion—all the delights of a good conſcience—and all the motives to laudable action, are highly proper for the diſcuſſion of rational beings. They who wiſh to improve in goodneſs, will naturally compare the grand and important movements of their reſpective minds—they will inform each other of the methods, which they take to correct their paſſions,

and reſtrain their exorbitant deſires—and will feel a noble ambition of improving by their mutual experience.

The ſocial hour, likewiſe, is the proper ſeaſon for the expreſſions of friendſhip—the overflowings of tenderneſs—and the ſympathetic emotions of the ſoul. The melting tale of woe may be employed, to excite the ſorrowful tear of compaſſion; or the narrative of unexpected felicity be related, to moiſten the eyes with the extatic tear of pleaſure and joy. All the tender ſenſibilities of the heart—all the delightful affections of benevolence and love, may be called into action; and rendered ſubſervient to the improvement of human nature—the happineſs of man—and the glory of God.

A noble fund of uſeful converſation may, alſo, be drawn from the grand diſpenſations of divine providence, as they are diſplayed in the revolution of kingdoms, the downfal of tyrants, and the general hiſtory of the world. The characters of great and excellent men, may be mentioned with pecu-

liar advantage; and their diſtinguiſhing virtues propoſed to our careful imitation. The ſacred writings afford an ample field for our exerciſe in this reſpect. They abound in inſtances, which may readily be applied to the common ſituations of life; and may always be happily introduced, as they are the objects of general knowledge.

Nor let the chriſtian be aſhamed to ſpeak of the character, doctrines, and precepts of his divine maſter. The goſpel of Chriſt is an inſtance of the goodneſs of God, which cannot be too much celebrated; it is of the utmoſt importance to the excellence and happineſs of life; and therefore demands the attention of every one who wiſhes to diſcharge his duty. Many obſervations may be made in a private, friendly converſation, concerning the divine miſſion of Chriſt, the deſign of his appearance, and the general tendency of his diſcoveries, which will be found highly ſubſervient to our improvement in goodneſs, and which cannot avoid being highly delightful to a ſincere chriſtian.

In a word, whatever is likely to excite a veneration for the ſupreme being, or to regulate the conduct of life, will be recollected with pleaſure by thoſe, *that fear the Lord*, and will afford them matter for entertaining converſation, when *they ſpeak one to another*.

Theſe, indeed, will be the ſubjects that will give them the greateſt pleaſure, and in which they will engage with the utmoſt readineſs. The introduction of religion will, by no means, abridge the delights of ſociety, or deſtroy the good humour which naturally prevails, when intimate friends aſſemble together. Its intereſting topics may be diſcuſſed with all the ſpirit, vivacity, and chearfulneſs, that are conſiſtent with the dictates of wiſdom. There is no need of the darkened room, the gloomy brow, or the melancholy tone. For what can be more friendly to the beſt intereſts of human nature than piety and virtue? What is more directly productive of all the pleaſing ſenſations of the ſoul? They are the nobleſt exertions of our rational powers. They are

perfectly agreeable to all the genuine emotions of the heart. There is nothing in them, that ſhould occaſion an undue reſerve, an aukward ſtiffneſs, or an unpleaſing languor in a friendly converſation. They may be treated with all the freedom, eaſe, and livelineſs, which render the ſocial hour ſo highly engaging. They are, by no means, inconſiſtent with the bright emanations of wit, the ſportive ſallies of joy, or the fire and activity of the youthful mind. They will produce all the pleaſure, which a man of a ſocial turn can juſtly expect from the enjoyment of riotous mirth; they are perfectly free from all its inconveniences; and occaſion an additional ſatisfaction that is peculiar to themſelves.

But here, my brethren, I am not recommending an indiſcriminate and perpetual introduction of religious topics: there are many ſeaſons, in which it would be totally improper and inconvenient; in theſe caſes, prudence muſt dictate and a due regard to circumſtances determine: I cannot however avoid expreſſing my hopes, that you are ful-

ly convinced of the propriety and importance of religious converſation. I am willing to believe that you who fear the Lord, will *ſpeak often one to another*, and teſtify the prevailing diſpoſition of your minds, by the topics which employ your ſocial hours. For unleſs you thus exerciſe yourſelves unto godlineſs—unleſs you form a fixed habit of piety and virtue on your minds, the inſtructions of the pulpit will be delivered in vain, and the public ſervices of religion be productive of no valuable effect.

SERMON VIII.

ON

TRUTH.

SERMON VIII.

On TRUTH.

MAT. xiv. 9.

And the king was ſorry; nevertheleſs for the oaths ſake——he commanded it to be given her.

FOR the oaths ſake! an awful obligation, my brethren! An oath is a ſolemn appeal to heaven; it is an act of a religious nature; and to trifle with it is to trifle with the ſacred name of the Deity. It ſeems, therefore, on the firſt view, that the king who is mentioned in the text, was influenced by a laudable tenderneſs of conſcience; and paid a juſt regard to the dictates of his duty. For a conviction of duty ought, undoubtedly, to be the principal rule of human conduct; however diſagreeable and painful the ſteps, which it commands, may be, its authority ought not to be controuled; a ſubjection to its dominion is inſeparably connected with the exerciſe of reaſon, and there is no appeal from its determination.

But let us ſuſpend our judgment for a moment. An examination of all the circumſtances of the caſe may lead us to form a different opinion; and may alſo throw ſome light on a ſubject, which hath frequently been miſunderſtood.

The Herod, whoſe conduct we are now conſidering, was the ſon of Herod the great; who had commanded the children of Bethlehem to be maſſacred, when he heard of the birth of Chriſt. And the ſon appears to have inherited the vicious diſpoſitions of his father. One particular inſtance of his diſregard to the laws of morality is connected with our preſent ſubject. He had ſeduced Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, from her fidelity to her huſband; and had himſelf openly taken her to wife. On this account he was reprehended by John the Baptiſt; his crime was laid open to his conſcience in its true light; and the unlawful nature of his connection was aſſerted, with all the plainneſs and authority of an inſpired prophet. He could not avoid feeling the juſtice of the cenſure; but as neither he,

nor his guilty partner, were diſpoſed to amend their conduct, their reſentment was naturally excited againſt their faithful reprover. They would willingly have put him to death; but they feared the people, who reverenced him as a prophet. They, therefore, kept him in priſon, and reſerved him for ſome future ſentence. In the mean time the birth-day of Herod returned, and was celebrated with the uſual rejoicings. The daughter of Herodias by her former huſband aſſiſted at the feſtival, and greatly diſtinguiſhed herſelf, on the occaſion, by the gracefulneſs of her dancing. Herod was charmed with her appearance; and, in the gaiety of his heart, promiſed with an oath, that he would give her whatſoever ſhe ſhould aſk. He, undoubtedly, imagined that ſhe would deſire ſome valuable preſent,—ſome ornament for her perſon, or addition to her enjoyments. But the opportunity was not to be neglected by her vindictive mother: ſhe therefore privately inſtructed her daughter to demand the head of John the Baptiſt in a charger. Herod was ſurpriſed at

the requiſition; the feſtivity of the aſſembly, and the deſign of their meeting were not calculated to diſpoſe the mind to ſo bloody a deed: the reaſons which had before ſaved the life of this hated prophet were, moreover, ſtill ſubſiſting in their full force: his reſentment, alſo, had in ſome meaſure ſubſided; his conſcience bore witneſs to the juſtice of the reproof; and he was unwilling to add the guilt of murder to adultery. All theſe conſiderations powerfully oppoſed the fulfillment of his promiſe. But he had bound himſelf by a ſolemn oath; his nobles and friends whom he had invited to the banquet were witneſſes of the obligation; and he muſt either violate his engagements to heaven, or take away the life of the Baptiſt.

And now, my brethren, what are the ſentiments which are excited in our breaſts by this repreſentation of the ſtory? Will the obligation, that is produced by an oath, juſtify the murder of an innocent perſon? In this apparent contradiction of duties, which courſe of conduct will demand the preference? There is no one, who will he-

ſtate to conclude that Herod would have been leſs guilty, if he had refuſed to fulfil his promiſe, notwithſtanding the ſanctity of the oath, by which it was confirmed. It is evident then, that circumſtances may occur, which will deſtroy the validity of the moſt ſolemn vow, and render the performance of it a crime.

The ſubject, however, is not a little delicate. When our feet tread on the narrow, and ſometimes almoſt imperceptible line, which ſeparates virtue from vice, the utmoſt circumſpection is neceſſary. A regard to truth is one of the firſt principles of morality. As a miniſter of Chriſt, therefore, I dare not appear in this place, to deſtroy or weaken its authority. When the intereſt of truth is ſacrificed, religion receives a mortal wound; and all the duties of life are deprived of their obligation. Be not alarmed then, my brethren, at the conſequences of the preſent diſcuſſion: the preacher of the goſpel cannot wiſh to leſſen your attachment to the ſacred cauſe of veracity: its influence will rather be promoted by an accurate en-

quiry into the relation, which it bears to other duties; and a view of the circumſtances, in which it ought principally to be diſplayed.

Truth, conſidered in the abſtract, is unalterable in its nature. It has been what it is from all eternity, and will always continue the ſame, independent of the ideas of every finite mind. A thouſand different opinions may be formed concerning a ſubject—the ſentiments of the ſame perſon may be amazingly various at different periods of his exiſtence; but truth, like its omniſcient author, will be always *without variableneſs or ſhadow of turning.*

Its nature, however, is in ſome meaſure altered, when it becomes the object of morality. The truth, which is imputed to a ſpeaker as a virtue, and the falſhood, which is imputed as a vice, depend entirely on the judgment, which that ſpeaker forms. If a man ſpeak what he believes to be true, he is entitled to the praiſe which belongs to truth. It is of no conſequence whether the aſſertion

be, in the abſtract, true or falſe; if it be his real opinion at the time, he is not chargeable with the guilt of a falſhood.

Truth then, conſidered as a moral virtue, is the language of the heart; it is a public declaration of what the mind internally believes; and conſiſts in a perfect correſpondence between the thoughts and the words. And in this view, its obligation is univerſal: no circumſtance can poſſibly ariſe, which will ſubvert its authority, and render a violation of it innocent or venial.

There are, indeed, many caſes, in which the public acknowledgment of our ſentiments may be inconvenient and hurtful: and in theſe caſes, ſilence is, undoubtedly, not only excuſeable, but an indiſpenſible duty. I cannot perceive, however, that ſtrict morals will allow us to go any farther. We may divert the converſation to another ſubject; but we ought not to contradict the ſentiments of our own minds. For are we not forbidden to *do evil, that good may come?*

It is our duty then, whenever we ſpeak at all, to aſſert what we actually think concerning the ſubject of converſation. The events that are *paſt* or *preſent* have received their ſpecific nature; and cannot be affected by the ſentiments, which are formed concerning them. But matters of *futurity* often depend entirely on ourſelves. And with reſpect to theſe, it is eaſy to perceive, that whenever they are the topics of our diſcourſe, we ought to ſpeak of them in terms that are ſuitable to the impreſſions, which they make on our minds. But it is ſurely far from being ſo evident, that our *preſent ſentiments* ought univerſally and unalterably to direct our *future conduct*. For what is this but to preclude ourſelves from the advantages of a farther acquaintance with the ſubject? Our preſent knowledge of it may be ſuperficial, imperfect, and erroneous; this knowledge, however, imperfect as it is, may lead us to form a reſolution; and to expreſs that reſolution in words. But who will aſſert, that this ill digeſted reſolution muſt be performed, merely becauſe it hath been expreſſed, altho' our better inſtructed

judgment ſhould be afterwards convinced of its impropriety? A ſimple declaration concerning our *future conduct*, therefore, cannot lay us under a perpetual obligation. It is nothing more than an aſſertion of our *preſent ſentiments*; and if it be a juſt expreſſion of our feelings, it is all that our duty requires. We may alter our opinion a thouſand times, and make a thouſand different reſolutions concerning our conduct in that particular reſpect, without any breach of good morals.

The caſe is more complicated, when any of our fellow men are intereſted in the event of our declared reſolutions. For the knowledge of theſe reſolutions may greatly affect their conduct; and induce them to direct their attention to the attainment of certain ends, which depend on our fidelity to our declarations. They will, therefore, ſuffer an injury by our means, if they be diſappointed of their expectations, in conſequence of any ſudden change in our reſolutions.

But

But in order to form preciſe ideas on this ſubject, it is neceſſary to take a diſtinct view of the ſeveral caſes of this kind, which may poſſibly occur. And here it is natural to divide our declarations concerning our future conduct to our fellow creatures into two claſſes, *threatnings* and *promiſes*.

I believe it is univerſally agreed, that *threatnings* do not produce a moral obligation. In civil matters, indeed, the declaration and the infliction of a puniſhment ſhould ſcarcely ever be ſeparated, when the reality of the crime is manifeſt. And the reaſon of this is evident. The puniſhments, that are appointed by the civil law, have no relation to the *moral* character of an *individual*. They are appointed to ſecure the regularity and welfare of *ſociety*: they are intended to operate as preventives of actions, which are detrimental to the *public*: and their efficacy in this reſpect entirely depends on the certainty and uniformity of their operation. The ideas of a crime and its adequate puniſhment ſhould always be ſtrongly aſſociated in the minds of the ſubjects of a

government; and the delinquent ſhould have no hope of eſcaping the juſt conſequence of his evil deeds. The civil magiſtrate, therefore, ſhould, only on very extraordinary occaſions, be induced to pardon a criminal: the ſentence of the law ſhould be the voice of fate; and ſcarcely any conſiderations of a perſonal nature, ſhould divert it from the courſe, which hath been preſcribed for the good of the community.

But the ſame ſeverity is, by no means, neceſſary in the execution of the private threatnings of an individual. For theſe are always of a conditional nature: they are deſigned to influence the conduct of that perſon alone, to whom they are directed, and have no reference to the general regulation of ſociety. They may therefore, be ſuſpended, mitigated, or revoked, whenever the particular circumſtances of the caſe ſhall render it expedient. The repentance and reformation of the offender will always be unanſwerable arguments in his favour: they remove the occaſion, on which the threat-

ning was delivered: and conſequently deprive the threatning itſelf of an exiſtence. It cannot, therefore, retain the ſhadow of an obligation—to execute it would be improper—and, if we conſider the ſubject with the ſtrictneſs which it deſerves, would in reality be a breach of truth. For it is certain, that the puniſhment of contrition and reformation was not intended; the mind, at the time when the threatning was pronounced, was influenced by very different ſentiments; and the words which it delivered were only a declaration of its abhorrence of a particular fault.

It appears from the ſacred writings, that this is the general rule of the divine operations in this reſpect. The wickedneſs of the inhabitants of Niniveh was great; and called for a puniſhment. Jonah, therefore, was commiſſioned to go into the city, and to *cry againſt it*. He publiſhed the threatning of the almighty; and loudly proclaimed, *yet forty days and Niniveh ſhall be overthrown*. The kings, the nobles, and their fellow citizens were alarmed at this awful prediction:

they *proclaimed a faſt and cried mightily unto God: they turned every one from his evil ways, and from the violence which was in his hands.* And what was the conſequence? Was the threatning executed, notwithſtanding theſe favourable appearances, becauſe it had been expreſsly declared? By no means, my brethren. The governor of the univerſe is *a gracious God, and merciful, ſlow to anger, and of great kindneſs; he ſaw their works, that they turned from their evil ways; and he repented of the evil, that he had ſaid he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

It is not, perhaps, altogether ſo eaſy to determine whether the execution of a threatning be morally neceſſary, when the ſituation and character of the perſon, againſt whom it was directed, remain exactly the ſame. In the government of the ſupreme being, we have reaſon to apprehend, that this is invariably the caſe. For the pure and holy God naturally approves virtue and diſapproves vice; and his infinite wiſdom will moſt certainly lead him to encourage the

one, and diſcourage the other, by their proper ſanctions. But where the confined knowledge of the human race is concerned, there ſeems to be room for much relaxation and ſuſpence. Many circumſtances may occur to render the actual execution of a poſitive threatning inexpedient; and as the perſon againſt whom it was denounced will certainly not inſiſt on its accompliſhment, the denouncer may ſurely, on ſeveral accounts, find reaſon to depart from his original intentions, and will, conſequently, be juſtified in directing his conduct by his preſent views.

But the nature and obligation of a poſitive promiſe muſt be eſtimated in a different manner. For, in this caſe, we voluntarily deprive ourſelves of our natural freedom; we enter into an engagement to another perſon; and inveſt him with a right to expect, and demand its fulfilment. Here, therefore, our veracity and integrity are deeply intereſted. A violation of our word in this reſpect, is a crime of a complicated nature and atrocious guilt. It is a breach of truth,

and an act of injuſtice; it is both a perſonal, and a ſocial immorality. When we have once pledged ourſelves to our brother, we have no right to change our opinion; we have put it out of our power to be influenced by future circumſtances; and have bound ourſelves to the abſolute performance of a particular act. Our own convenience and intereſt ceaſe to be proper objects of attention. The promiſe continues to be ſacred, notwithſtanding any diſadvantage to ourſelves, which may ariſe from its fulfilment; for it is part of the character of the upright man, as it is admirably deſcribed by David, that *though he ſweareth to his own hart, he changeth not.*

But how are we to act, when a pernicious promiſe is extorted from us by force, and when we are terrified into an engagement, by the fear of immediate death, or of ſome other terrible evil? It is a maxim in ſocial morals, that a right to demand, and an obligation to comply cannot exiſt ſeparate from each other. That is to ſay, we may law-

fully refuſe to anſwer every expectation which is not founded on ſome juſt and reaſonable ground. Now it is abſurd to ſuppoſe, that a natural right can be produced by an action, which is in itſelf evidently immoral. The force, which, in this caſe, is employed, is a manifeſt violation of ſocial duty; the promiſe which it produces, is, therefore, in the nature of things, abſolutely null and void. Nor can it, in reality, be imputed to the perſon from whom it is thus extorted; it is rather the effect of a mechanical neceſſity, and does not come within the deſcription of a moral act. In ſtrict juſtice, therefore, a promiſe, that is made in ſuch circumſtances, cannot produce any obligation of a future correſponding conduct. But yet it will not be entirely without its effect upon a delicate mind. A lively ſenſe of the ſacred nature of truth, and a firm habit of general fidelity, will unavoidably be accompanied by an inclination to fulfil, even an extorted promiſe, if it be not very diſadvantageous, or inconſiſtent with a poſitive duty.

This laſt circumſtance is, indeed, abſolutely neceſſary. For it ſurely will not be difficult to demonſtrate, that an inconſiſtence with moral duty is ſufficient of itſelf to render engagements of every kind entirely void of obligation. And by this deduction we are led to the immediate deſign of the preſent diſcourſe. Truth in general is of a ſacred nature; every declaration of our lips ought to have a perfect correſpondence with our preſent ſentiments; promiſes of every kind have an additional force, and will not be totally diſregarded by the habitual lover of virtue, even when they are not produced by the free conſent of the will. Yet ſtill, they muſt in all caſes be regulated by the general and unalterable laws of morality. Whatever is palpably inconſiſtent with theſe cannot be binding to a rational creature. For the laws of morality are the rules by which a rational creature, as ſuch, is obliged to act. To deviate from them is to deviate from the conſtitution of his nature, and to ſubvert the end of his exiſtence. Such a deviation, therefore, is repreſented by the ancient civilians, as a moral impoſſibility.

We ought to believe, ſay they, that it is impoſſible for us to commit any action which is hurtful to piety, reputation, or good manners in general.* Or in other words, we cannot commit ſuch actions, without ceaſing to be rational agents, and contradicting the pureſt ſentiments of our minds.

It is, therefore, fully evident from theſe principles, that every ſimple declaration of our intentions concerning our future conduct, every abſolute promiſe, and every ſolemn oath by which ſuch promiſe may be confirmed, muſt, of neceſſity, be utterly deſtitute of obligation, if they have any of theſe unlawful actions for their object. They are declarations of an impoſſibility: they are reſolutions of a poſſeſſor of reaſon to act contrary to the laws of reaſon: they are obligations which are founded on no right, and are, therefore, nothing elſe than direct contradictions in terms. To form them is a crime—to perſevere in them is to perſevere in a crime—to break them is to return to virtue.

* See the admirable Burlamaqui's Principles of natural Law. Book 1. ch. 11. § 2.

The moſt ſolemn vows and ſacred oaths make no alteration in the caſe, only as they encreaſe the atrociouſneſs of the original guilt. For what can be more abſurd, than to imagine that an oath, or an awful appeal to heaven, can render that a duty, which the laws of heaven have expreſsly forbidden? It cannot be lawful, then, to fulfil an engagement which reaſon diſapproves, and which is inconſiſtent with any of the relations which we bear to our creator or fellow men.

It is poſſible indeed, that the reſolution, or the promiſe, may be expreſſed in ſuch general terms, that its improper conſequences may be unforeſeen and unexpected. And in this caſe, it is rather an inadvertence than a fault; an error than a crime. The vow of Jephtha was produced by a laudable ſpirit of devotion; its general deſign was agreeable to the ſpirit of the times; and the manner in which it terminated was accidental and unſuſpected. Its execution, therefore, if it were really executed, was the reſult of falſe ideas with reſpect to religious obligation.

The oath of Herod, alſo, was in its original intent perfectly faultleſs. It was the expreſſion of an innocent feſtivity; and was deſigned to afford an opportunity for the exertion of benevolence. The vindictive reſentment of a guilty woman prevented its natural iſſue; and, in conſequence of the unguarded manner in which it was delivered, perverted it to an immoral purpoſe. *She*, therefore, was the original author of the crime; and *Herod* was, in this reſpect, entirely innocent, until he complied with her deſires.

Upon the whole, my brethren, it is evident that we ought to be extremely cautious how we form reſolutions; make abſolute promiſes; or enter into the ſacred obligation of an oath. The morality of truth ought in no caſe whatever to be ſported with. Our religion requires us to fulfil our engagements, even when they have been imprudently formed, if they have nothing unlawful in their nature. But when they are ſuch as cannot be performed without involving us in guilt, they muſt not be ratified. And as it is therefore neceſſary for us to break our

word, it is undoubtedly our duty to humble ourſelves before the ſupreme being; to confeſs our fault in expoſing ourſelves to ſuch a ſituation; and to manifeſt the ſigns of a ſincere repentance.

If we act otherwiſe, and, like Herod in the text, overcome the reluctant feelings of our minds, we ſhall add deliberate vice to precipitate imprudence, perpetuate a caſual error, and fix the character of atrocious vice, on what at firſt was nothing more than the unadviſed language of irregular paſſion. Let our preſent ſentiments, then, be the only rule of our preſent conduct. Let us correct our paſt miſtakes by the means of deliberate reflection, and never imagine that any former inadvertence is a ſatisfactory excuſe for a perſeverance in improper conduct. Let us maintain an inviolable fidelity to our vows, promiſes, and declarations, whenever they do not interfere with our general duty; but if at any time we ſhould be ſurpriſed into an engagement which is inconſiſtent with the laws of morality, let us inſtantly acknowledge the fault, and retract the aſſer-

tion. For if a reſolution to do that which is wrong muſt, from the very nature of the terms, convey the idea of a blameable operation of the mind, how is it poſſible that its actual execution ſhould be innocent! In this caſe, the morality of truth is, by no means, the proper object of attention; it has here no lawful juriſdiction; and, if it aſſert its authority, it intrudes upon the province of duties, which are equally ſacred and indiſpenſible.

SERMON IX.

AGAINST

THE FEAR OF MAN.

SERMON IX.

Againſt the Fear of Man.

PROV. xxix. 25.

The fear of man bringeth a ſnare.

THE goſpel of Chriſt, my brethren, hath an admirable tendency to form its profeſſors for extenſive uſefulneſs in ſocial life. It propoſes to promote the glory of God, by producing peace on earth, and good will among men. On this account, it abounds with arguments in favour of univerſal benevolence, and recommends all the [illegible] of mankind to each other's notice and affection, under the endearing character of brethren. It diſcourages every hoſtile paſſion; abſolutely forbids all immoderate anger, malice, and envy; and checks every uncharitable and cenſorious diſpoſition.

And we eſteem it our duty, as the miniſters of this amiable religion, to devote a conſiderable portion of our public diſ-

courſes to theſe pleaſing ſubjects. We ſeldom lead you into the barren and unprofitable field of controverſial theology; we ſhould think ourſelves unfaithful to our truſt, were we to take up your time, and perplex your underſtanding, with the intricate ſubtleties which have never been known to produce a ſingle beneficial effect, but have furniſhed occaſion for innumerable unchriſtian feuds. On the contrary, we endeavour to ſpeak to your ſocial affections, and to awaken the benevolent emotions of your hearts. We labour to convince you, that the religion which we preach, is friendly to your happineſs in every connection of life. We lay it down as a firſt principle, that the way to prepare yourſelves for the rewards of heaven, is to render yourſelves pleaſing, amiable, and uſeful on earth. Hence we exhort you to *conſider one another to provoke unto love*; to enter into each others feelings; to *be pitiful* and *courteous*; to offend none of your fellow creatures willingly and deſignedly; but to *rejoice* in their happineſs, and to omit no friendly endeavour to encreaſe their ſatisfaction.

On theſe ſubjects we expatiate with a lively pleaſure. We think our labours happily ſucceſsful, when we prevail upon you to exerciſe the diſpoſitions, which form the peaceable citizen, the benevolent neighbour, and the tender relative. We feel the excellence of our office, when we are exhorting you to *love one another, as our divine maſter hath loved you.* We are inſpired with a glowing enthuſiaſm, when we are repreſenting you as the poſſeſſors of a common nature, the children of the one living God, and the candidates for a ſimilar happy immortality.

And greatly ſhould we rejoice, if the duties of our miniſterial character were never to lead us from theſe delightful topics. But we are obliged ſometimes to enter upon a leſs agreeable employment; and to caution you againſt the pernicious conſequences of an improper regard to your brethren. Were all mankind wiſe and good, we ſhould not be afraid that you could ever extend your mutual confidence beyond its

proper bounds—we ſhould wiſh you to oblige each other in every poſſible ſituation and circumſtance. But unhappily, there are many of the human race, who are not the friends either of truth, or of virtue. And the influence of theſe perſons will be highly pernicious, if you have not reſolution enough to think and act for yourſelves; or do not ſtudy the preciſe degree of attention which you owe to others.

For though the virtues of ſocial life are eſſential parts of the chriſtian character, they muſt, by all means, be confined within their proper ſphere; and be prevented from encroaching upon any of the other obligations which ariſe from our character as the moral offſpring of God. Whenever we are induced, by a regard to our fellow men, to oppoſe the conviction of our own judgment, we are departing from the path of rectitude, and are diminiſhing the excellence of our lives. Whenever we are deterred from adhering to the dictates of conſcience, by a fear of incurring the diſapprobation of our aſſociates, we violate our

duty to God, and *ſin againſt our own ſouls. The fear of man* frequently involves us in *a ſnare* of the moſt dangerous kind. For there are many caſes, in which we are bound to oppoſe the ſentiments of numbers, perhaps the majority of our fellow creatures, with inflexible firmneſs. And tho' the conteſt muſt always be painful to a benevolent mind—tho' a ſuſceptible heart derives its moſt delicate pleaſures from the approbation and applauſe of its brethren; yet ſtill theſe difficulties muſt be reſolutely encountered—theſe delights muſt be willingly reſigned, for the ſake of what is always much more important, the teſtimony of an approving conſcience. Whenever our own conviction of truth or of duty, contradicts the opinion of the world, the opinion of the world muſt be neglected—our own private conviction muſt be the ſole director of our conduct. In theſe reſpects, if we wiſh to avoid the ſnare which is pointeſt out in the text, we muſt neither be afraid of *ridicule*, nor of *reproach*, nor of *bodily perſecution*.

I. The fear of ridicule is a dangerous ſnare, when it has an undue influence on the conduct.

The ſenſe of ſhame was, undoubtedly, implanted in our conſtitution to anſwer many valuable purpoſes. It is naturally occaſioned by an apprehenſion either of the *indignation*, or the *contempt* of mankind. In the former caſe, its cauſes are ſome of the vices and enormities, which affect the welfare of ſociety, and give a ſenſible pain to our moral feelings; in the latter, they are ſome ſmaller improprieties of conduct, which are rather fooliſh than pernicious, and throw a ridiculous appearance on the character. In both theſe reſpects, this inſtinctive principle is calculated to have a happy influence on the life. It was implanted in our conſtitution to be one of the guards of our virtue; to make us ſolicitous to maintain a general decorum of behaviour; and to preſerve us from many errors, which would otherwiſe blemiſh our conduct.

And, for this purpoſe, its operations are remarkably forcible and efficacious. There is not any other of our paſſions, that is ſo compleatly humiliating and painful. All the reſt of our diſagreeable emotions are tempered by ſome alleviating mixture, which inclines us to indulge them with willingneſs and complacence. The violence of anger is ſupported by the flattering inſinuations of pride, and the elevating ſenſe of affronted dignity. The melancholy of ſorrow is ſoothed, while it is confirmed and encreaſed, by reflecting on the objects which once gave it pleaſure. And even deſpair itſelf derives ſo ſtrange a delight from the frantic expreſ-

wiſhes for tranquillity. But ſhame is accompanied by no affection, which can either ſupport, or alleviate the uneaſineſs of its ſenſations. It is a compleat dejection of ſpirit; a mortifying conſciouſneſs of diſhonour; and is never continued, or even originally felt, with the free conſent of the will.

Every

Every friend to himſelf, therefore, will undoubtedly dread both the indignation and contempt of his brethren; every member of ſociety will be naturally deſirous to ſupport his character in life, with propriety and dignity. The *indignation* of mankind is ſeldom excited without ſome juſt and ſufficient reaſon. For the characters of open and enormous *vice* are too ſtriking, and too oppoſite to the natural ſentiments of the human heart, to be generally miſtaken. But *contempt* is much more uncertain and fallible in the choice of its objects; as the diſtinctions of *folly* are much leſs accurately and [illegible] things which are ſo ridiculous in their own nature, that they ſtrike us with their true light as ſoon as they appear. But notwithſtanding the readineſs with which we determine on theſe particular occaſions, ridicule is, by no means, a ſufficient and univerſal teſt either of truth, or of excellence. The moſt ſerious and important ſubjects have frequently been burleſqued by the wanton ſallies of intemperate wit: the moſt ſublime compoſitions which the world hath ever

ſeen, have not been exempted from this unlucky perverſion. And we naturally ſmile at the humour which is thus produced. But tho' we feel the force of the ridicule, we do not acknowledge its propriety—we are not induced to alter our ſentiments concerning the original paſſages—we ſtill admire their unrivalled beauty, and reverence them as the productions of elevated genius.

In the ſame manner, my brethren, it is poſſible ſo entirely to miſrepreſent a laudable principle, as to give it an appearance which may excite the deriſion of the obſerver. It is not difficult, by the addition of a few circumſtances, and the artful alteration of others, ſo to diſguiſe the moſt noble action, as to render it the object of contempt. And it is in this reſpect, that *the fear of man* is frequently hurtful to the intereſt of virtue. There are very few indeed, who are armed with ſufficient reſolution to withſtand the ſcoff of the ſcorner, and to hazard the reputation of preciſeneſs and ſingularity. Where arguments have entirely failed—where oppoſition hath been

to no purpoſe, ridicule hath produced the intended effect, and hath made many a well-diſpoſed mind aſhamed of its own principles. Ridicule, therefore, is a weapon which is often uſed by the partizans of profaneneſs and immorality. All their art is employed to repreſent the devotional exerciſes of a rational piety, as the wild effuſions of a miſguided ſuperſtition—to conſtrue the fear of God into an imbecillity of ſpirit—and to explode a general ſobriety and regularity of manners, as the effect of a cold imagination, or a miſerable avarice. Innumerable are the methods by which virtue may be deprived of its native divinity of appearance, and rendered the ſubject of deluſive raillery and impertinent vivacity. And if the mind be not fortified againſt theſe dangerous attacks—if the ſenſe of ridicule be not regulated by the principles of reaſon—if juſt ideas of propriety and impropriety be not carefully retained, the conſequences may be fatal to the character—a man may be aſhamed of avowing the conviction of his own mind, till at length, he forget to bluſh, when all the wiſe and good find them-

ſelves obliged to bluſh for him.

The friend of virtue, therefore, will be ſteady to his profeſſion. Having ſtudied the nature of actions, till he hath acquired an accuracy of diſcernment, he will not be diverted from his purſuits by a lively jeſt, or a look of contempt; but will be inflexible in his laudable purpoſes, ſecure of being unhurt by the pointed arrows of wit and ridicule. In this reſpect, the fear of man will have no influence upon his mind; or, if it begin to riſe in his boſom, will ſoon be ſuppreſſed by more generous principles. He will remember, that it is only the baſer parts of mankind to whoſe ſcorn he is expoſed—that he will be ſecure of the approbation of thoſe whom it is an honour to pleaſe—and that in the end, he will be ſuperior to all the malevolent arts of the wicked. But ridicule is not the only oppoſition, which is encountered by the friends of virtue. We are to obſerve

II. That the fear of reproach is ſometimes a dangerous ſnare to thoſe who are required

by their conſciences to contradict the opinions and practices of mankind.

It is the characteriſtic of the wiſe and good, that they provoke each other to the exerciſe of virtue, and are the delighted ſpectators of their mutual improvement. But the fooliſh and vicious are univerſally unwilling, that any one ſhould be thought either wiſer or better than themſelves. Hence hath ariſen the obloquy, which hath ſo often attended the excellent of the earth. The moſt exalted characters that ever exiſted, have not been able to eſcape calumny; the moſt uſeful lives that ever bleſſed and adorned human ſociety, have been miſrepreſented and abuſed by the envious and malicious. The benevolent, and amiable Socrates, he who ſpake with the mouth of wiſdom, and whoſe general conduct was governed by an unaffected regard to the welfare of mankind, fell a victim to ſhameleſs accuſers, as an introducer of ſtrange Gods, and a corruptor of the youth.* But

* See Xenophon's memorable diſcourſes of Socrates, Book 1. Chap. 1 and 2.

we ſhall not be ſurprized at the hurtful attempts of deſigning wickedneſs againſt this admirable ſage, when we find that the great author and finiſher of our faith paid the ſame tribute to prejudice and malice. Never was there any other life ſo compleatly conformable to the laws of God, and ſo generally uſeful to mankind, as that of Jeſus of Nazareth. And yet, notwithſtanding all its unrivalled excellence, where can we diſcover a more devoted object of malignant perſecution and determined oppoſition? Every opprobrious reflection which could excite the contempt and indignation of mankind, was liberally caſt upon our divine maſter. The Jews ſuſtained the yoke of the Roman government with a kind of indignant impatience: the character of a publican, or a tax gatherer, was therefore peculiarly odious, and was generally coupled with the appellation of ſinner. How then, could the Scribes and Phariſees more ſtrongly expreſs their hatred of Jeſus, than by repreſenting him as *a friend of publicans and ſinners?* The poſſibility of an intercourſe with

dæmons was one of the popular tenets of the times; and the perſons by whom ſuch an intercourſe was ſuppoſed to be maintained, were conſidered as eminently flagitious and deteſtable. Nothing, therefore, could better anſwer the purpoſe of the enemies of Chriſt, than a declaration that he cured the diſeaſes of lunatics, or, in the language of the age, *caſt out dæmons, by the power of Beelzebub*, the prince of thoſe imaginary beings.

Such, my brethren, are the injurious lights in which diſtinguiſhed virtue hath always been repreſented by the malignant adherents of vice. There is not a virtue which is not liable to ſome ill-natured repreſentation: there is not an action which may not be diſtorted from its natural appearance, and exhibited to public view in unfavourable colours. This perverſe diſpoſition is ſtrongly deſcribed by our Saviour in a pathetic addreſs to the Jews. *To whom*, ſays he, *ſhall I liken this generation? It is like unto children ſitting in the markets, and calling to their fellows; and ſaying, we have piped unto you,*

and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he hath a Devil: the son of man came eating and drinking, and they say behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.

And it is not a little painful to the well-disposed mind to be thus injured in the public opinion, and deprived of the praise to which it has an undoubted right. The heart that is warmed with universal benevolence, will, unavoidably, be affected even by the hatred of the vicious; it will feel their censures, and be wounded by their bitter words. But then it will not renounce its integrity, to avoid the uneasiness which may be occasioned by the reproaches of its enemies. In this case, the opinion of mankind is not to be regarded; we are not to solicit their approbation, nor *be afraid of their faces.* We may, and we must, grieve at their ungenerous and dishonourable proceedings; but we are to pass *thro' evil as well as good:*

report in the practice of our duty. Whatever falſe gloſſes may be put upon our actions, we are to be *ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.* While we ſecure the approbation of our omniſcient creator, and the applauding teſtimony of our own hearts, we are to be ſuperior to *the fear of man.* And in this noble reſolution we are to perſevere

III. Tho' we ſhould be expoſed to bodily perſecution and death.

Skin for ſkin, yea all that a man hath will he give for his life, is a ſentiment, which hath been a ſource of temptation from the time of Job to the preſent day. And it is certain, that we are formed with an inſtinctive dread of death. We are naturally anxious to preſerve our preſent exiſtence, and fly, by an unavoidable neceſſity, from every thing, which threatens our deſtruction.

But notwithſtanding life is ſo indiſputably valuable—tho' it is the deareſt of our earthly poſſeſſions; there are occaſions,

when it ought to be riſqued without heſitation. *Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do*, is one of the ſublime precepts of the new teſtament. And whenever we cannot retain our integrity, without expoſing our lives to the malice of the vicious, we are to prefer the rectitude of our conduct, and to leave the event to the wiſdom and benevolence of the almighty ruler.

It is happy for us, that our fidelity to our creator does not frequently require theſe ſevere exertions of our fortitude. In the common affairs of life, we meet with no violent oppoſition, when we purſue the dictates of virtue. We may ſometimes be ridiculed or defamed for our reſolute adherence to the principles of conſcience, but we are ſecured from perſonal injury by the ſalutary regulations of the civil laws.

There have, however, been inſtances in which the laws of God, and the laws of man were at variance: the civil magiſtrate hath ſometimes preſumed to interpoſe his

authority, in matters which are foreign to his juriſdiction, and have no relation to the peace of ſociety. When thoſe who poſſeſs the reins of political government endeavour to reſtrain the rational progreſs of the enquiring mind—forbid the exerciſe of private judgment in matters that are altogether of perſonal concern—and hold out pains and penalties to the conſcientious worſhipper of God, it is the duty of every one to reſiſt the uſurpation, and to aſſert the natural rights of an intelligent agent. For it is better to *obey God than man*; and when the great ruler of the earth commands, the fear of an human being is a fooliſh, as well as culpable timidity.

In theſe reſpects then, my brethren, it is incumbent upon us to be ſuperior to *the fear of man.* There is no ſocial duty which requires us to indulge any of our fellow-creatures at the expence of our conſciences. We are to love mankind as our brethren—to promote their intereſt—to treat them with kindneſs—and to cultivate a general politeneſs of manners. We are even ſometimes

to ſubmit to their prejudices in matters of indifference; but in matters of perſonal duty, we are to be ſteady to our principles. Ridicule muſt not affect us, reproach diſcourage, nor perſecution terrify. We owe much to our fellow men; but we owe much alſo to ourſelves. If we yield to any of theſe attacks upon our virtue and integrity, we manifeſt a diſhonourable timidity, ruin our characters, and ſacrifice our moſt important intereſt. If we permit the fear of man to ſuppreſs our virtuous inclinations —if we ſuffer ourſelves to be deterred from purſuing the dictates of our own minds by the laugh of the ſcorner—if we dread the reproaches of the wicked—or diſſemble our ſentiments for the ſake of avoiding perſecution, we ſhall be perpetually in danger of error, irregularity, and vice; ſnares will beſet us on every ſide; we ſhall have no fixed principle of action; and ſhall be at the mercy of the moſt abandoned of mankind. Then let us riſe ſuperior to every improper fear; let us make it evident by our general conduct that we wiſh to oblige all our fellow men; but let us, at the ſame time,

convince the wicked, that there are actions into which we cannot be forced, either by ridicule, reproach, or bodily perſecution.

SERMON X.

AGAINST

THE EXCESS OF GOOD NATURE.

SERMON X.

AGAINST

THE EXCESS OF GOOD NATURE.

SERMON X.

Againſt the Exceſs of good Nature.

MATT. xiv. 9.

And the king was ſorry; nevertheleſs, for the ſake of them which ſat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

THE *fear of man*, my brethren, *bringeth a ſnare.* Too great a ſenſibility to human opinion is highly unfavourable to the ſteadineſs of our virtue. For it will often happen that the ſentiments of mankind do not correſpond with our own conviction of duty. And if, on theſe occaſions, we heſitate to oppoſe them, we ſhall deviate from the path of rectitude, and diminiſh the excellence of our characters. It is neceſſary, therefore, to be proof againſt the force of ridicule, to defy unjuſt cenſure, and even to ſuffer bodily perſecution or death, rather than violate the ſacred dictates of conſcience. In our intercourſe with our fellow men, it is incumbent upon us to remember that the eſteem of the wiſe and

good ſhould be the principal object of our concern, and that we muſt expect ſometimes to experience the malice of the wicked.

But our greateſt danger does not ariſe from either the ridicule, the reproach, or the perſecution of men. When the attack is thus open and undiſguiſed, we are unavoidably put upon our guard; we have time to recollect our ſituation, and to ſummon our religious principles to our aid. Oppoſition gives vigour to our original reſolutions; convinces us that an increaſe of fortitude will be requiſite; and awakens into action that noble pride, which is produced by a due regard to the dignity of the human mind. We inſtantly recollect that it will be diſhonourable for us to yield; and are led by a laudable reſentment, to combat ridicule with reaſon, to treat reproach with ſcorn, and to endure the violence of perſecution with courage.

There is another reſpect in which the undue influence of our fellow creatures is much more powerful in its operations, and

extenſively hurtful in its conſequences. We have an inſtance of it in the words of the text. When Herod heard the particular manner in which the daughter of Herodias deſired the fulfilment of his promiſe, he was ſhocked at the propoſal, and for a moment with-held his concurrence. The life of an innocent man was of too great value to be given away in a ſportive mood; and nothing was farther from his thoughts, when he made the haſty declaration of which his guilty companion had taken ſo diſingenuous and cruel an advantage. But he recollected that ſome deference was due to the partakers of his ſocial banquet. *They* alſo had been charmed with the dancing of the daughter of Herodias; they had been witneſſes of the promiſe which he had made her in the unſuſpecting gaiety of his heart; and were diſpoſed to wiſh that her requeſt might be granted, however unreaſonable it was in itſelf, or deſtructive in its effects. He was, therefore, urged to a compliance by a regard to *them who ſat at meat with him*, as well as by a reverence of his *oath*; and

accordingly ordered the head of the baptiſt to be given her.

The Roman Governor Felix may be be produced as another inſtance of the ſame culpable diſpoſition. He had been fully convinced of the innocence of Paul, by the manly eloquence and ſpirit of his defence. He had been pierced to the heart, when his venerable priſoner *reaſoned of righteouſneſs, temperance, and judgment to come.* He had felt the demerit of his own character, when compared with the character of a man who ſtood before him in chains, and waited his judicial ſentence. But tho' his own conſcience bore teſtimony againſt him—tho' he could not avoid perceiving that Paul was unjuſtly accuſed, yet, when *after two years, Porcius Feſtus came into Felix room, Felix,* WILLING TO SHEW THE JEWS A PLEASURE, *left Paul bound.*

It was the ſame readineſs to be directed by the improper wiſhes of others, which induced Pilate to give up the ſon of God to his enemies. *Why what evil hath he done?*

was his ſpirited reply to the Jews, when they vehemently exclaimed, *crucify, crucify him*; but when they ſtill *cried out the more exceedingly, crucify him, Pilate*, as the hiſtorian informs us, WILLING TO CONTENT THE PEOPLE, *releaſed Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jeſus, when he had ſcourged him, to be crucified.*

Innumerable other inſtances of the ſame undue influence might be produced, from the ſacred writings, and from the hiſtory of every nation. But it is not neceſſary to have recourſe to the events of paſt ages for examples. We ſee it too frequently in our intercourſe with the world—we experience it too ſtrongly in the courſe of our own lives. We are all ready, in ſome reſpect or other, to act contrary to our own judgment, in compliance with the public opinion, and thro' the deſire of obliging our aſſociates. There are many occaſions when we embrace propoſals which we are *ſorry* to hear, but which, *for the ſake of thoſe that are with us*, we are unwilling to refuſe.

And this error is the more dangerous, as it ariſes from an amiable diſpoſition, and is nothing more than the exuberance of good nature. The benevolent heart enjoys a peculiar delight when it communicates pleaſure; its nobleſt ſatisfaction ariſes from the happineſs of mankind; and when it is conſcious that this happineſs is occaſioned by itſelf, it experiences a complacence which no other object can produce. Some violence, therefore, muſt be done to its natural inclination, before it can refuſe to acquieſce with the deſires of a fellow creature. For human nature is formed with ſo ſtrong a propenſity to the ſocial affections, that we naturally deſire to obtain the good opinion of the men with whom we are converſant. Whenever a ſtranger is introduced to our acquaintance, we are immediately inclined to treat him with civility and politeneſs; to anticipate his wants; and to expreſs a readineſs of contributing to his pleaſure. And ſince this is the caſe when there is no bond of connection beſides the participation of a common nature, how powerful muſt be the influence of the ſocial principle, when it is

aſſiſted by a perſonal knowledge, ſtrengthened by habit, and animated by the delightful expreſſions of reciprocal affection! How charming is the approving ſmile of thoſe whom we have long been accuſtomed to love! What are the inconveniences which we are unwilling to ſuffer, for the ſake of giving them delight? What are the labours, which we ſhould not think abundantly repaid, by a ſingle glance at the joyous tear which ſparkles in a grateful eye?

Theſe ſenſations, my brethren, conſtitute the pureſt and moſt lively parts of our terreſtrial happineſs; and the principles by which they are produced, are the glory of our nature. But as the *exertion* and *right direction* of them conſtitute the perfection of ſocial virtue; ſo the *exceſs*, or rather *miſapplication*, as well as the *total neglect* of them, juſtly deſerves the diſhonourable character of vice.

It is very eaſy to indulge an obliging and courteous diſpoſition to an improper degree; it may be diſplayed in circumſtances which

require a different behaviour; and may be highly pernicious to the moral excellence and happineſs of the mind. Indeed, the perverſion of every laudable propenſity ſhould be guarded againſt with the utmoſt caution; for it ſlides upon us in a manner that is ſcarcely perceptible; and, as the original principle is good, we eaſily deceive ourſelves, and entertain a belief that all its conſequences are entitled to the ſame deſcription. Thus how readily do piety and devotion degenerate into weak ſuperſtition and irregular enthuſiaſm! And how exceedingly difficult is it to correct the evil, and reſtore the mind to a proper ſtate! In the ſame manner, benevolence and good nature, if they be not duly regulated, will ſoon become a culpable eaſineſs and irreſolution of temper. The original inclination to pleaſe will grow into a habit of compliance with every requeſt; and, however we may grieve at the conſequences of an action—whatever reluctance we may feel in our own minds, yet, *for the ſake of thoſe that are with us*, we ſhall yield our aſſent.

Such

Such an habitual diſpoſition, my brethren, muſt be, not a little, diſhonourable in itſelf, and ſtill more pernicious in its conſequences.

I. This undue flexibility of temper is, not a little, diſhonourable to the perſon who is ſubject to its influence.

It is the character of one of the worſt men of antiquity,* that he had the addreſs to include within the circle of his acquaintance, perſons of totally oppoſite characters; to adapt himſelf to their various diſpoſitions; and to become whatever their occaſions required: with the ſorrowful, he was ſad; with the chearful, jocund; with the old, grave; with the young, gay; with the abandoned, ſhameleſs; with the debauched, diſſolute. This verſatility of diſpoſition was in *him* the effect of conſummate art, and was purpoſely adopted to enſure the ſucceſs of his flagitious deſigns againſt the liberties of his country, and the property of his fellow citizens.

* Cataline. See Cicero's Oration in defence of Cælius.

The temper which is the ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe, is ſomething ſimilar in its appearance, though different in its origin. For the perſon in whom it is found is equally able to join the virtuous, or the vicious—the prudent, or the thoughtleſs—the lover of intellectual improvement, or the ſlave to ſenſual indulgences. But then this facility of compliance is, in this caſe, the effect of a good-natured weakneſs, an unwillingneſs to appear ſingular, and a fooliſh deſire of giving univerſal ſatisfaction. He has not ſufficient vigour of mind to give a negative to any propoſal; he is therefore always directed by the company with which he is engaged, and follows the lead of every one with whom he happens to aſſociate. If he be fortunate enough to be connected with the wiſe and good, he readily enters into their ſentiments, manners, and employments; he acknowledges the ſuperiority of their characters, reſolves to profit by their example, and diſclaims all future connection with the intemperate and profane. But his reſolutions vaniſh as ſoon as he is ſeparated from his virtuous friends. The firſt per-

ſon of a different diſpoſition that accoſts him, diverts him from his purpoſe, effaces all his laudable impreſſions, and leads him by the hand into the paths of folly. Thus the paſſive mirror inſtantly reflects the image of every object to which it is expoſed. But when the objects are removed, the images as inſtantly diſappear. Other objects ſucceed, and the effect is exactly the ſame; whether they be beautiful or deformed, agreeable or diſpleaſing, they form a picture equally diſtinct, and are received with equal readineſs.

It is eaſy to perceive, my brethren, that ſuch a ſtate of mind is utterly incompatible with any dignity of character. There is, indeed, a certain degree in which this facility of adopting the diſpoſitions of others is ornamental and uſeful. No one would chooſe to introduce a melancholy countenance into the houſe of feſtivity, or to oppoſe the acclamations of joy to the ſighs and groans of diſtreſs. The general principles of piety and decorum will incline us to aſſume the tone of the company; and the

ſympathy, which is natural to the human mind, will make it eaſy for us to ſuit ourſelves to the occaſion, as far as decency requires. The pleaſure of human ſociety, moreover, greatly depends on a mutual accommodation of taſtes and purſuits. We are naturally pleaſed with ſuch a compliment to our underſtanding, and unavoidably acquire an affection for the perſon who honours us with ſuch a flattering attention.

This diſpoſition, therefore, when it is properly regulated is a deſireable embelliſhment of ſocial life. But as it cannot be innocent, whenever it is made ſubſervient to the purpoſes of deſigning miſchief; ſo it will ceaſe to be agreeable, whenever it is known to be a habit which diffuſes itſelf over the whole conduct, without any deliberate intention, or regard to propriety. What, indeed, can be more truly deſpicable than a man who has no ſteadineſs or reſolution—who is incapable of any conſiſtence of character, and is perpetually changing to the temper of his aſſociates? What dependence can be placed upon his promiſes or reſolu-

tions? Or how can we be delighted with his profeſſions of approbation? He is nothing more than the echo of the perſons with whom he converſes, and is ready to acknowledge his aſſent to every opinion that may be offered to his conſideration. Deſtitute of any ſentiments of his own, he thinks, and acts as he is led by others, and whether he be wiſe or fooliſh, virtuous or vicious, is left to the accident of the moment—to the caprice, or deſign of his companions. And with ſuch a fickleneſs, how is it poſſible for him to be the object of eſteem? His good nature may, perhaps, ſometimes be coldly commended. But what merit is there in good nature which is not founded upon principle, and which is rather the effect of an inactive mind, than of a benevolent heart? He will accordingly be often ſpoken of in favourable terms; his errors and faults will be generally lamented; but he will never extort applauſe, or conciliate affection.

This exceſſive deſire of giving ſatisfaction to all our fellow creatures will, therefore, be diſappointed of its purpoſe, and, inſtead of rendering a man univerſally agreeable, will reduce him to a ſtate of general inſignificance. But this is the leaſt inconvenience which it will occaſion. For we are to obſerve

II. That it is exceedingly hurtful in its conſequences.

If we conſider it in a general view, we ſhall find that it is utterly incompatible with any degree of virtue. For virtue is nothing leſs than a fixed habit of goodneſs —a continual and uniform repetition of excellent actions, till they become the diſtinguiſhing parts of the character, and are practiſed with eaſe and alacrity. But what habit is a perſon of this kind capable of forming, unleſs it be a *habit* of *inconſtancy?* And is not this ſomething like a contradiction in terms? It would be as rational to expect a conſtancy of weather in our variable climate, where the wind is continually

ſhifting round the compaſs, as to look for any fixed reſolution, or uniformity of conduct, in a man who is pliable to every entreaty, and receives his occaſional turn of mind from the companion of the minute. It would be no more abſurd to write letters upon the water, and to expect their figure to remain, than it is to hope for the continuance of any good impreſſion which he may accidentally receive.

A diſpoſition that is thus unfavourable to virtuous improvement, cannot be friendly to the acquiſition of happineſs. When the mind is thus frequently hurried from one extream to another, it muſt, of neceſſity, be a ſcene of diſſatisfaction, uneaſineſs, and remorſe. Though it is not able to preſerve its reſolution, it cannot loſe its conſciouſneſs and memory. The ſenſe of its weakneſs will occaſion it many a painful reflection. It will feel the impropriety and folly of its conduct; and, at the ſame time, will be taught by its paſt experience, that it cannot depend upon itſelf for any hope of

amendment. Whence, then, can it derive any conſolation, or ſupport? It finds itſelf inclined to comply with every temptation which may be ſuggeſted by its aſſociates—it is conſcious of a natural averſion to refuſe, and yet is ſenſible that, in conſequence of this openneſs to perſuaſion, it will often act contrary to its own conviction.

A man of this temper, therefore, cannot expect to obtain any laſting happineſs, even if he ſhould have the good fortune to eſcape the deſtructive machinations of the artful and unjuſt. But it is ſcarcely poſſible for him to ſecure himſelf againſt the dangers which will attack him on every ſide. There are, alas, too many who are always ready to take advantage of the weakneſs of a fellow creature—to impoſe upon his good nature, and render it ſubſervient to their own intereſt. The world abounds with men of every poſſible diverſity of character. And unleſs we make a proper diſtinction in our acquaintance, and arm ourſelves againſt the perſuaſions of thoſe who are enemies to propriety and virtue, we ſhall often be ſeduced

into fatal errors, and ſhall find that the *deſire* of *obliging*, as well as the *fear* of *offending*, *bringeth a ſnare.*

Let us then, my brethren, be cautious and circumſpect in all our ſocial connections. Let it be our firſt object to form a ſet of principles with reſpect to the conduct of life, which are never, on any occaſion, to be ſacrified. Let us ſtudy thoſe unalterable laws of morality, which are of perpetual obligation to every moral agent. And to theſe ſacred principles let us accommodate all our actions. Whenever we are tempted to act contrary to their dictates, let us be nobly inflexible. The character of good nature, and of a readineſs to oblige, will be a poor recompence indeed, for the loſs of our innocence, and the violation of our conſciences. In all other reſpects, it is incumbent upon us to be kind, indulgent, and courteous—it will reflect an honour on our character to be eaſily perſuaded, and unwilling to give pain to a fellow creature. But in this, we are to be ſuperior to all in-

fluence. When propriety of conduct, and purity of life are in queſtion, good nature is weakneſs—courteſy is folly—compliance is guilt.

SERMON XI.

ON

THE DANGEROUS INFLUENCE OF LITTLE FAULTS.

SERMON XL.

ON

THE DANGEROUS INFLUENCE
OF LITTLE FAULTS.

SERMON XI.

On the dangerous influence of little faults.

1 THESS. v. 22.

Abſtain from all appearance of evil.

THE goſpel of Chriſt, my brethren, was intended to produce a principle of religion in the mind. It does not ſatisfy itſelf with enjoining an abſtinence from the groſſer and more enormous vices: but commands its profeſſors to avoid the minuteſt faults; to refrain from every action of a doubtful nature; and to indulge themſelves in no practice, which, however innocent it may be in itſelf, is, in any reſpect, of an evil tendency. It requires an univerſal regard to the ſacred laws of God; a ſteady perſeverance in every thing which is good; and a ſeries of unremitted endeavours after the attainment of perfection.

In conformity with this grand deſign of chriſtianity, it is the duty of its preachers to caution their hearers, againſt the ſmalleſt

deviations from virtue. We ſhould be deeply affected, if we believed, that thoſe whom we eſteem our friends and our brethren in the goſpel, habitually devote themſelves to any aggravated vice. We truſt, my brethren, that *you have not ſo learned Chriſt*; and that you tremble at the idea of turning the grace of God into licentiouſneſs. When we inveigh againſt crimes of a capital nature—when we deſcribe all the fearful properties of unreſtrained wickedneſs—when we foretell the fatal conſequences of daring impiety, habitual malevolence, or flagrant injuſtice, it is with a view, rather to prevent than remove the evils, which are the ſubjects of our diſcourſe. For this purpoſe we endeavour to preſerve lively ideas of their deformity in your minds; and to cheriſh that horror of their influence, which is natural to the unperverted underſtanding. We point out the difference between the effects of *your* principles and of thoſe which regulate the conduct of the workers of iniquity. We remind you of the ſuperiority, which you have already gained over the general power of vice; and ſtimulate you to

farther improvements in goodneſs, by the conſideration of your preſent progreſs.

But when we direct your attention to faults, which are leſs ſtriking and formidable —when we point out the minute imperfections which may blemiſh, though not altogether vitiate a character—when we remind you of thoſe *appearances of evil* which are rather hurtful in their remote, but probable conſequences, than in their immediate influence, we cannot flatter ourſelves, that our labours are only of the preventive kind —we are anxious to provide a remedy for evils which have already taken place—we earneſtly entreat you to exert yourſelves in the correction of errors which you are too ready to indulge. For we are ſenſible that, in theſe reſpects, the friends of virtue are in the greateſt danger. They are bleſſed with the general approbation of their own conſciences; and are ſatisfied that they have no reaſon for diſſatisfaction with reſpect to the more important duties of life; they, therefore, live in a ſtate of tranquil ſecurity, to which, in a general view, they have an in-

diſputable title. But then, this tranquil ſecurity is, ſometimes, the cauſe of their falling into hurtful errors. For it occaſions an inattention to ſmaller irregularities, which are rather imprudencies than abſolute vices; which are not conſiderable enough to wound their moral feelings, and deſtroy the peace of their minds; but which are, nevertheleſs, of no little importance, when their influence on the general conduct of life is conſidered.

The true friend of goodneſs, therefore, ought, by no means, to be inattentive to imperfections of this inferior kind. Tho' amidſt the many avocations of life, and even ſometimes in the very purſuit of virtue, he may be too ready to overlook them, he will be ſenſible of his errors when they are expoſed to his view, and will eſteem it his duty, not only to keep himſelf free from atrocious vice, but to *avoid the appearance of evil. When he thinketh he ſtandeth, he will take heed leſt he fall. He will fear in every thing, and in the day of* innocence *beware of offence.*

And his conduct in this respect, my brethren, is warranted by the nature of the human mind, and the general experience of the world. For however trifling one of these smaller imperfections may appear when considered in the detail, it will assume a very different form when it is connected with others, and becomes a constituent part of the prevailing character—however comparatively innocent it may be in itself, it will be highly pernicious in its natural consequences—and whatever opinion we ourselves may entertain concerning it, the world in general will concur in a different judgment, and will deduce from it many unfavourable inferences with respect to our general character. It is worthy of observation

I. That however trifling one of these smaller imperfections may appear when considered in the detail; it will assume a very different form, when it is connected with others of a similar kind, and becomes a constituent part of the prevailing character.

The merit or demerit of a moral agent is eſtimated, not ſo much by the quality of any ſingle action, as by the complexion of his general conduct. A vice of a ſuperior rank, if it be inſtantly repented of, and never afterwards repeated, will by no means vitiate the character in the ſame degree, as a ſmaller fault which is habitually indulged, and is become a diſtinguiſhing property of the mind. As it is poſſible, by the continual addition of ſimilar grains, to encreaſe a ſmall heap of ſand to a conſiderable ſize; ſo the multiplication of minute irregularities in the conduct will, before the end of life, produce an enormous quantity of moral evil. As a man, who frequently laviſhes away trifling ſums on unneceſſary occaſions, and he who hazards more than he is worth at a ſingle caſt, may both be equally bankrupts; ſo a *repetition* of actions, which have little more than the appearance of evil, may be no leſs pernicious than the *ſingle* commiſſion of a vice, which is regarded with much greater horror.

For

For a character, like almoſt every thing elſe with which we are converſant, is a whole compoſed of a great number of parts. And if we deſire to form a juſt idea of its excellence, we muſt take all theſe ſeveral parts in conjunction; aſcertain their relative value; and from the ſum total of their various degrees of intrinſic excellence, determine the worth of the whole.

Virtue and vice, moreover, derive their principal and moſt diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic, from the habitual influence, which they acquire. And there is no ſmall difference between a ſudden breach of the divine law, which is contrary to the prevailing diſpoſition of the mind, and a confirmed inclination to an irregularity, which is perpetually producing a ſeries of uniform effects.

But here let me not be ſuppoſed to be attempting an apology for the commiſſion even of a ſingle, unrepeated vice. No, my brethren; the feelings of the virtuous mind on theſe melancholy occaſions, afford an in-

conteſtible evidence, that he who, in any reſpect, ſinneth againſt God, woundeth his own ſoul. I am only labouring to convince you, that a number of ſmall offences may be equal in guilt to a ſingle action of a more atrocious nature. This, however, is the weakeſt argument, which I am to produce in favour of the precept in the text. For we may obſerve

II. That there are many actions which, though trifling in themſelves, are productive of unhappy conſequences.

The prevailing diſpoſition of the ſoul never becomes vicious at once. Vice is ſo contrary to all our pureſt feelings, and to all the natural dictates of our underſtanding, that ſome time muſt elapſe before it can be perceived, and much longer before it can be practiſed, without reluctance and trepidation. Let perjury, robbery, or murder be propoſed to a man, whoſe mind is not habituated to iniquity, and he will be chilled with horror; he will think it impoſſible that he ſhould ever become capable of ſuch enormous

crimes; and will be aſtoniſhed when he reflects on the degeneracy of men, who poſſeſs the ſame nature with himſelf. And yet, my brethren, how many of our fellow creatures commit theſe horrid vices, with all the appearance of deliberate reſolution! And to what can this profligacy of manners be owing, but to a gradual progreſs from ſmaller to more heinous irregularities, 'till at laſt they are hurried, almoſt before they are aware, into the extremity of wickedneſs?

It muſt be confeſſed, that much depends on the influence of education, and the force of principles, which are imbibed in the early ſtages of life. When a child is trained up to iniquity from his mother's knee, and has been accuſtomed to ſee all laws both human and divine deſpiſed and diſobeyed; we may naturally expect, that as he grows in years, he will make gigantic ſtrides in the career of vice; become the peſt of ſociety; and, at length, fall a victim to the natural conſequences of his crimes. But, when the originally amiable and virtuous

diſpoſitions of the mind have been aſſiſted by a pious education—when the youthful paſſions have been held under proper reſtraint—and the opening reaſon hath been furniſhed with uſeful principles, it will be long before the character can become entirely vicious. It is by no means eaſy for men, ſuch as I perſuade myſelf are now aſſembled together, to break through all the reſtraints, which they have received from nature, education, and habit, and to plunge into premeditated villany.

But yet the hiſtory of the human mind affords too many ſad proofs of the poſſibility of ſuch a fall. And the ſteps, by which this unhappy change is produced, are ſufficiently evident. The unexperienced mind is firſt ſeduced by ſomething which hath ſcarcely *the appearance of evil.* It cannot, however, avoid perceiving, that even theſe comparatively ſmall irregularities are wrong; and, for a little time, does not indulge itſelf in them, without ſome degree of reluctance. But the idea of their ſmallneſs, and conſequent venial nature, overcomes the

remonſtrances of conſcience, till at length they become familiar objects, and are no longer regarded with diſapprobation.

When the mind hath thus paſſed over the bounds of rigid virtue, all future deviations are much leſs difficult. However little it may have departed from the principles of the ſtricteſt rectitude, the defection is begun; and, though the obſervation is found in an apocryphal book, it is as true as any doctrine of the received canon, that *he who contemneth ſmall things ſhall fall by little and little.* As a ball, which is ſet in motion on a ſmooth declivity, will gain freſh degrees of velocity every moment of its progreſs; ſo, when a man hath once ſuffered himſelf to be ſeduced into a trifling irregularity, he will find himſelf more inclined to fall into a greater. *The appearance of evil* will gradually pave the way for the introduction of its reality. *The beginning* of vice in general, as well as *of ſtrife* in particular, *is like the letting out of water*; it is therefore the part of wiſdom, in the emphatical language of the proverb, to *leave off*

immorality *before it be meddled with.* So that we may juſtly apply to theſe ſmall appearances of evil, what the apoſtle aſſerts of the tongue; *behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.* For the leaſt deviation from goodneſs, when traced to its direct, though perhaps remote conſequences, will be found to contain in it an inexhauſtible ſource of moral evil. The erring heart can never ſay to itſelf, ſo far will I go and no farther. All the various vices to which the human race are liable, have a mutual, though often ſcarcely perceptible connection with each other; and whenever we are habituated to one, we ſhall poſſeſs leſs ſtrength to oppoſe the temptations which will incline us to the reſt. From ſmaller to greater is the natural progreſs of the human mind in all its purſuits; and there is nothing, which can infallibly ſecure us from aggravated vices and complicated enormities, but a reſolute oppoſition to little faults, and an habitual dread of *the appearance of evil.*

And is this, my brethren, the univerſal tendency of vice? Does it firſt ſteal upon

the ſoul in ſome diminutive form, afterwards aſſume ſuperior boldneſs, and at laſt obtrude its moſt abandoned countenance? Should we not then carefully guard againſt every thing which bears its appearance, or is attended by any ſuſpicious circumſtance? If there be any truth in the repreſentation which is here given (and the experience of the world teſtifies that it is all moſt religiouſly true) we cannot entertain a doubt concerning the precept in the text, and muſt by all means reſolve to avoid every *appearance of evil.*

But ſuppoſe that theſe fatal effects may poſſibly be avoided; yet ſtill, if we have any regard to the opinion of our fellow men, we ſhall purſue the ſame courſe of conduct. For we may obſerve

III. That whatever opinion we ourſelves may form of the appearance of evil, mankind in general will concur in a different judgment, and will deduce from it, many unfavourable inferences with regard to our general character.

Our reputation in the world depends more upon little things than is often attended to, or imagined. And the ſentiments of mankind in this reſpect are, for the moſt part, perfectly right. For as little and comparatively trifling actions are never the produce of much reflection, but generally flow ſpontaneouſly from the heart, they are, undoubtedly, ſome of the leaſt ſuſpicious indications of its real diſpoſition. It is an old obſervation, that the true character of a great man is beſt diſcovered by a view of his conduct in the management of his domeſtic affairs, and of his behaviour in the unreſtrained hours of ſocial converſe. And the aſſertion is not only true, but of general application. For we may conclude univerſally, that in the greater actions of life, when a man knows that he is expoſed to the eye of the world, and is carefully obſerved by the ſurrounding ſpectators, he will proceed with caution, and, if he poſſeſs only a common ſhare of prudence, will aſſume an appearance of virtue, however he may be deſtitute of the reality. But in matters of leſs importance, he will be leſs ſuſpicious,

and will conſequently more readily diſcover to an attentive obſerver, the genuine complexion of his mind.

There are likewiſe peculiar reaſons, why the appearance of evil, and an habitual repetition of inferior faults, are prejudicial to the character. For as the virtuous are well acquainted with the inſidious nature of vice, they are always fearful, that the reality is connected with the appearance; and that habitual, tho' comparatively trifling miſdemeanours, will gradually introduce atrocious vices. And thoſe, who are vicious themſelves, greedily lay hold of every appearance of it in others. By the malignity of their hearts they readily magnify every little imperfection, and joyfully conclude, that though the external behaviour may be a little fairer, the internal diſpoſition is no leſs deformed than their own.

So weighty, my brethren, are the arguments by which the precept in the text is ſupported. So fatal is the influence of an habitual indulgence of apparently inconſi-

derable faults. For the minuteſt irregularity will greatly vitiate the mind, when it is frequently repeated—it will gradually diſpoſe us to the commiſſion of more heinous offences—and is, moreover, in itſelf, and independent of its conſequences, highly unfavourable to our general reputation in the world.

Influenced by theſe conſiderations, let us guard againſt every error in our conduct. Let us manifeſt the ſincerity of our religious profeſſion by an univerſal obedience to the laws of God. Let us attend not only to the more ſtriking and capital duties of life, but labour to be perfect in every reſpect, and to be compleat in the finiſhing, as well as in the grand outlines of our characters. Let us avoid the *appearance of evil*, as well as the reality; examine into the probable tendency, as well as the immediate influence of an action; and recollect the conſequences of a little imperfection when formed into a habit.

SERMON XII.

AGAINST

CERTAIN FAULTS WHICH, ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR SUPPOSED MINUTENESS, ARE GENERALLY OVERLOOKED.

SERMON XII.

Againſt certain faults which, on account of their ſuppoſed minuteneſs, are generally overlooked.

1 THESS. v. 22.

Abſtain from all appearance of evil.

I AM willing to believe, my brethren, that there is not one of you, who did not feel the force of the arguments, which were offered in the preceding diſcourſe. You were convinced that the continual repetition even of ſmaller faults will detract much from the excellence of the character—that the indulgence of theſe minute imperfections will, moreover, gradually prepare the ſoul for the commiſſion of greater crimes—and that your general reputation in the world may be not a little affected by actions which appear trifling and inconſiderable. You perceived that, on theſe accounts, you cannot be too circumſpect in your conduct—you were terrified at the

conſequences of every deviation from goodneſs—and you immediately reſolved to *abſtain from all appearance of evil.*

But recollect, I beſeech you, my brethren, what it was, which thus excited your fears, and gave birth to your reſolutions. Did you inſtantly review thoſe parts of your own character, which may poſſibly be comprehended under that general deſcription? Did you conſider in what reſpects you are peculiarly liable to *the appearance of evil*, and how far it hath obtained an influence over you? Unleſs our diſcourſes have this effect upon your minds, they will anſwer no valuable purpoſe. They may entertain the imagination, or ſatisfy the judgment; but they will not amend the heart, or contribute to the excellence of the life.

You cannot, then, be unwilling to purſue this important ſubject a little farther. It will be uſeful to deſcend to particulars, and to take a nearer view of the minute evils, from which you are commanded to abſtain. While we deal in general ideas,

we cannot expect to make any lively impreſſions on your minds, or to produce any material change in your conduct. You may acknowledge the excellence of virtue and the turpitude of vice, and yet be lamentably deficient in many important duties. You may be eminent in the principal parts of the chriſtian life, and yet overlook ſome inferior errors which, in the end, will be highly injurious to your beſt intereſts. On this account, we eſteem it our duty to omit nothing which is at all connected with the conduct of life; and you muſt bear with us, if with an honeſt, but friendly freedom, we expoſe to your view the foibles to which all mankind are, more or leſs, liable, and from which the beſt of you are, perhaps, not totally free.

But you will always take notice, that, though we are as minute as poſſible in the deſcription of particular faults, our diſcourſes are not delineations of individual characters. Like the ſkilful hiſtorical painter we endeavour to draw all our features

and proportions, all our lights and ſhades, from the real ſtate of human life; we do not willingly introduce any diſtorted or unnatural figure; and, when we ſucceed to our wiſhes, we inſtantly ſtrike you with the accuracy and ſpirit of our drawings. But we profeſs to exhibit no perſonal portraits. Though the repreſentations which we give, are ſuch as we know actually exiſt in many of the human race, they are not ſervilely copied from any ſingle original.

We confeſs, however, that we ſhould ſpare our labour, if we did not hope that you will frequently apply our deſcriptions to yourſelves, and diſcover that they are juſt expreſſions of what paſſes within your own boſoms. We muſt have ſtudied human nature and human life very ſuperficially and unprofitably, if we did not ſometimes hold up the mirror to your minds, and exhibit them in their exact form and appearance. It is in this view, that we wiſh our enquiries into the ſmaller imperfections of human conduct to be conſidered. We point out the danger to which mankind are expoſed

by paying too little regard to the appearance of evil. We endeavour to remove the inadvertence, by which ſome of the wiſe and good indulge themſelves in practices which, to ſay the leaſt of them, reflect no honour on a character, and from which there is an eaſy tranſition to habits of a more atrocious nature.

It is impoſſible to conceive of any two ideas, that are more abſolutely contradictory to each other than the general ideas of virtue and vice. But notwithſtanding their manifeſt and ſtriking difference when viewed in their extremes, they run into each other by ſuch gentle gradations, that it is often difficult to determine their preciſe boundary. As there are many points in the rainbow where two neighbouring colours are ſo blended together, that the niceſt eye cannot diſtinguiſh to which they belong; ſo there are many actions which are ſo nearly allied to both virtue and vice, that it is not eaſy to aſſign them their proper denomination, and to decide whether they ariſe from a good or an evil principle.

This ambiguity ariſes from a variety of very different circumſtances; and it is ſufficiently obvious to obſerve in the general, that as far as an action, in any reſpect, bears the appearance of vice, it ought always to be avoided. But to do juſtice to the preſent ſubject, and to render it either intereſting or uſeful, it will be neceſſary to enter into a more minute detail, and to inveſtigate the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtics of theſe dubious actions with ſome degree of preciſion.

There are ſome actions which, as far as morality is concerned, are entirely indifferent, and equally diſtant from virtue and vice. Theſe, therefore, cannot poſſibly be dangerous; provided they be practiſed at proper ſeaſons, in proper circumſtances, and in a degree that is not ſuperior to their importance. But if any of theſe particulars be neglected, the action itſelf becomes in that reſpect improper and hurtful. It is, therefore, included under the general idea which is ſuggeſted in the text, and muſt be avoided as *the appearance of evil.*

Thus the moſt innocent amuſement, for inſtance, if it be purſued beyond due bounds, and permitted to ſupplant any of the eſſential duties of life, will immediately loſe its original nature, and deviate into vice.

There are likewiſe many actions which are in reality poſitively vicious, but aſſume the ſemblance of virtue, and impoſe upon the world under a borrowed name. Theſe cannot be diſplayed with too great accuracy, nor oppoſed with too great warmth and earneſtneſs. To theſe, therefore, we think it our duty to devote a conſiderable ſhare of our public diſcourſes. But with theſe we are not at preſent immediately concerned.

The errors which we now propoſe principally to conſider, are thoſe which, though really on the wrong ſide of indifference, are in ſome reſpects ſo near to it, that they are overlooked by the generality of mankind; and eſteemed of too trifling a nature to detract from the excellence of the general conduct.

Of

Of all the follies to which mankind are liable, there are none which are more extenſive in their nature, or pernicious in their conſequences, than thoſe which conſiſt in an improper uſe of the tongue. *If any man offend not in word*, ſays the apoſtle James, *the ſame is a perfect man, and able alſo to bridle the whole body.* For there are many who would ſtart at the idea of a vicious action, who, nevertheleſs, give themſelves a licence in converſation, which cannot be reconciled with the dictates of abſolute propriety. There is, indeed, nothing which is more generally pleaſing than the freedom of ſocial intercourſe, the lively emanations of wit, and the ſportive ſallies of humour. They exhilarate the ſpirits, ſweeten the temper, and greatly invigorate the mind. They diſpoſe us for the exerciſe of the benevolent affections; and by the agreeable relaxation which they afford, give us freſh alacrity in the important duties of life. No one, therefore, but a ſplenetic enthuſiaſt, would wiſh to damp this pleaſing vivacity. But ſurely every friend to mankind muſt be earneſtly deſirous, that even theſe hours of

feſtivity ſhould be regulated by the principles of piety, morality, and decency.

The horrible oaths and execrations of the habitual ſwearer, and the ſhocking language of the profeſſed debauchee, are, at preſent, entirely out of the queſtion. They are not only inconſiſtent with the character of the gentleman, but beſpeak a total want even of common ſenſe, and render the perſon by whom they are uſed, unworthy of a place in civilized ſociety.

But it is eaſy to jeſt on ſacred things, and on ſubjects which are not altogether the propereſt ſubjects of converſation, in a manner that is not deſtitute of refinement. And it is poſſible by the diſplay of a lively wit, and by the dexterous uſe of a phraſe, which will bear a double meaning, to diſguiſe the impropriety of the topic, and to render it ſo far from diſguſting, as to be really entertaining. But if we conſider the matter ſeriouſly, my brethren, is not this to put on too much of the appearance of evil, and to travel in a path which will gradually lead

us to a great diſtance from the line of perfect rectitude? For can a wanton ridicule of any of the principles of religion, or a departure from the language of the ſtricteſt decency, be conſiſtent with the ſentiments which ought to be the prevailing characteriſtics of a good man? *Out of the abundance of the heart*, ſaith our ſaviour, *the mouth ſpeaketh*. And it is certain, that the *purity of heart* without which we cannot *ſee God*, will naturally diſplay itſelf in a pure and chaſtiſed converſation.

The influence of ſuch an undue licence muſt alſo be highly pernicious. If we accuſtom ourſelves to trifle with the ſacred name of the Deity, and permit the levity of the unbending hour to degenerate into the appearance of profaneneſs, the power of religion over our hearts will ſoon be greatly diminiſhed. A habit of indulgence in improper *diſcourſe*, will naturally produce a habit of indulgence in improper *actions*. The native delicacy and lively feeling of the mind will be gradually deſtroyed, and the moſt flagrant exceſſes will ſteal upon the

ſoul, till they acquire a force, which can ſcarcely be counteracted. *Let your ſpeech be ſeaſoned with ſalt* is, therefore, an excellent maxim; and we muſt by all means *take heed to our ways that we ſin not with our tongue*, if we wiſh to avoid the appearance of evil.

Another irregularity which is connected with our preſent ſubject, is a ſportive and intentionally innocent deviation from truth. He that deceiveth his neighbour to his hurt is univerſally eſteemed a deteſtable character. But when a falſhood is not calculated to injure any of our fellow creatures, and is, moreover, recommended by the appearance of wit, or a ſubſervience to the good humour and gaiety of a company, it is generally regarded in a very different light. There are a thouſand inſtances in which truth is daily violated, without producing any remorſe in the ſpeaker, or diſapprobation in the hearer. Sometimes a talent for invention is employed in the embelliſhment of a pleaſing narrative. Sometimes it is the effect of vanity,

and is introduced to extenuate, recommend, or gratify ſome favourite foible. And ſometimes it is intended to produce a temporary ſuſpence, and to furniſh an occaſion for an agreeable ſurprize.

Theſe, as you will eaſily perceive, my brethren, are the moſt favourable inſtances which can poſſibly be produced. A deviation from truth is, indeed, in theſe, as well as in all other caſes, deſigned to deceive. But as there is no intention to injure, it is generally believed to be as equally diſtant from vice, as it muſt on all ſides be allowed to be unconnected with poſitive virtue. It is honoured with an epithet which is the moſt common metaphorical deſcription of innocence; and is practiſed without heſitation by many, who would not employ it on other occaſions, for the ſake of the greateſt advantage.

But notwithſtanding all the ſpecious excuſes which are produced in its favour, it will be difficult to prove that it differs from *the appearance of evil* which is expreſsly for-

bidden in the text. For let us conſider the natural conſequence of an habitual inclination to this kind of falſhood. It is impoſſible to believe that a life which is devoted to a continual repetition of theſe imagined harmleſs deviations from truth, can lay any claim to excellence. And, if we recollect its direct tendency, we ſhall be fully convinced that it cannot be a matter of indifference. Truth, my brethren, is univerſally much too ſacred to be trifled with. It is ſo neceſſary, in all the great affairs of life, to the regularity and happineſs of the community, that its force cannot be weakened, or its obligation rendered leſs extenſive, without looſening the bonds of civil ſociety. And is there not ſome danger, that an inattention to it in one reſpect, ſhould gradually prepare the mind for a neglect of it in another? If the ſmall temptation of ſoothing a contemptible vanity, or of encreaſing the chearfulneſs of a convivial meeting, be at all times eſteemed a ſufficient reaſon for diſpenſing with its authority, is it not poſſible that ſuch an evident ſelf intereſt may ariſe, as

will induce us to violate its obligation, when the welfare of others is materially concerned? Is it likely, that the man who cannot preſerve himſelf from the meanneſs of a falſhood, when a momentary gratification is in proſpect, ſhould be able to reſiſt the powerful inducement of a ſubſtantial and permanent intereſt? For who will deny that ſuch perſuaſives to a violation of the truth are frequently occurring? And who is not ſenſible, that the combined power of principle and habit is, ſometimes, only juſt ſufficient to ſecure the integrity of the mind? Will not every friend to virtue, then, in this caſe alſo, avoid *the appearance of evil*, and dread the ſmalleſt ſtep towards a habit which, if it be once compleatly formed, will totally vitiate the character?

In the ſame manner, my brethren, it is incumbent upon us to abſtain from every action which is unfavourable to the exerciſe and improvement of any juſt, or generous affection. That which is indifferent in its own nature, becomes eſſentially bad when it is made ſubſervient to the growth

of avarice, envy, petulance, or deceit. Whenever we perceive that any of the occupations of amuſement are productive of theſe pernicious effects, we can no longer purſue them in an equal degree, without the loſs of our innocence and ſelf approbation. Whatever has a tendency to form us to a habit of profiting by the inferior ſkill or inadvertence of a brother cannot be morally expedient. In all our minute as well as important actions, in our relaxations as well as ſeverer employments, it is of the utmoſt importance to behave with generoſity, as well as rigid integrity. And it is no excuſe for a departure from principle, that the advantage propoſed to be gained, is too trifling to be treated as a ſerious object. For if a man accuſtom himſelf to counteract the dictates of generoſity or integrity in *jeſt*, he muſt be more than human, if he be not gradually tempted to adopt a ſimilar behaviour in *earneſt*.

The laſt appearance of evil which I ſhall mention on the preſent occaſion, is a

ſatirical diſpoſition which exerts itſelf to entertain a company at the expence of ſome of its members. There are few large ſocieties, in which there is not at leaſt one perſon, who has ſome foible or imperfection which may eaſily be rendered the ſubject of raillery. And when this is laid hold of and expoſed, not with the appearance of ill nature, but with an agreeable vivacity and good humour, it often contributes not a little to the mirth of the general party, and may, perhaps, produce no very diſagreeable feelings in the perſon himſelf. But if we reflect on the natural tendency of an habitual diſpoſition of this kind, we ſhall by no means conſider it as free from *the appearance of evil.* For whenever it is indulged to any conſiderable degree, it will neceſſarily impair the ſocial principle. An acknowledged ſkill in delicate and refined ridicule is too flattering to human pride, to be permitted to remain inactive. It will naturally diſplay itſelf on every occaſion, till at length it produces a habit of obſerving the conduct of our brethren to diſcover and expatiate on their follies: and it is evident, that ſuch

an inclination will neither induce us to eſteem their perſons, nor to imitate the virtues which they really poſſeſs. It is impoſſible to reflect frequently on the weaker parts of a character, without ſome degree of contempt; and when contempt is once formed, affection can no longer be retained; a ſeverity of reprehenſion will gradually take place, and what was at firſt produced by a well, or rather not ill meaning propenſity to lively, but good humoured raillery, will at length degenerate into the habitual exertion of a malignant heart.

It would be eaſy, my brethren, to expatiate largely on the preſent ſubject; for a wide field of obſervation is opening upon us on every ſide. But it is time to draw near to a concluſion. From the ſpecimen which hath now been exhibited to your view, you will readily purſue the induction in your own minds, and will be able to determine the minute imperfections to which you are expoſed.

It is ſufficient to obſerve upon the whole, that abſolute perfection is the point of excellence after which you are commanded to aſpire. And to perſons who have ſuch a conſummation to animate their ambition, no fault, no error, no foible, is trifling and indifferent. Therefore, my beloved brethren, let us not ſatisfy ourſelves with a freedom from atrocious vice, but let us labour to be conformable to the will of God in every particular. Whatever little irregularities we may diſcover in our conduct or temper, let us inſtantly amend. Whatever is neceſſary to the farther improvement of our characters, let us labour to obtain, that we may be *perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* Let us not imagine that we have *already attained, and are already perfect; but forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto thoſe things which are before,* let us *preſs towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus.*

THE END.

BRITISH 5 DE 73 MUSEUM